



THE LENTEN MEDITATIONS 2023 – WEEK 6

HOPE AT THE TOMB OF CHRIST

BY TARA LUDWIG

As Lent comes to a close, and we look forward to Easter, we cling to the promise of the Resurrection, and Jesus' message of hope for all people. And yet, when many of us look at the world we actually live in, things seem distinctly hope-*less*; one could spend hardly 5 minutes watching the news before deciding that the most rational thing to do is to just give up all together. I have often heard people, especially those who pride themselves on being logical, or a "realist", say something like, "I always choose to expect the worst, that way I won't be caught off guard. And if the worst DOESN'T happen, well then, I get to be pleasantly surprised."

This approach is understandable, even reasonable, maybe, at a time when we have all become accustomed to being constantly bombarded with bad news. It is just the way we live now. Hope may sound a lot like wishful thinking; it seems irrational, naïve, to continue to have hope when we have so much evidence that the world is going up in flames.

This feeling was certainly a familiar one to the disciples after the person they loved most, their friend and Lord, Jesus, was tortured and barbarically murdered. To them, the crucifixion was not just the end of Jesus' life, it was the end of everything they believed in, everything they had hoped for. Any spark, any crumb, of hope would have seemed to them like utter madness, as we will hear now in the 16th chapter of the Gospel of Mark:

Now after Jesus had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it. After that, He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country. They went away and reported it to



the others, but they did not believe them either. Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen. (Mark 16:9-14)

Why did the disciples not believe the witnesses who told them they had seen the Christ? Jesus told them, over and over, that he would rise on the third day; even the Pharisees knew Jesus had said this, and they took it seriously enough that they stationed guards at the tomb just to make sure there was no funny business. But the disciples, Jesus' closest friends, couldn't believe he had risen, even when their own people testified that they'd seen him. What was going on here?

I think sometimes we use hopelessness as a defense mechanism; we don't want to have our hearts broken by seeing our hopes dashed to pieces, so we choose not to have any. Remaining hopeless protects us from pain, and hope asks a lot of us; a vulnerability that sometimes we are just not willing to give. The disciples could not bear to get their hopes up that Jesus was alive only to find out that it wasn't true. The pain would have been too great. And their rational minds told them that it was impossible anyway; Jesus was in a tomb, he'd died on a cross, how could he be alive now? It didn't make any sense.

And the truth is that Easter *doesn't* make sense; nothing about Jesus ever did. It didn't make sense that he came as a baby and not a king; it didn't make sense that he was both man and God; it didn't make sense that he could make the blind see and the lame walk, it didn't make sense that he preached forgiveness and loving your enemy to a people that had been oppressed for generations, and it didn't make sense, it never will, that he died on a cross and was resurrected from the dead.

Our faith can't be limited only to what we can make sense of; if it could, God would just be way too small. Christian theologian and scholar Jaroslav Pelikan put this bluntly when he wrote: "The Holy is too great and too terrible when encountered directly for men of normal sanity to be able to contemplate it comfortably. Only those who cannot care for the consequences run the risk of the direct confrontation of the Holy."

This brings us to the archetype of the "Holy Fool", a person who lives in such direct relationship with God that little of what they do seems logical or normal according to the wisdom of the world. St. Paul talks about this over and over in 1st Corinthians, saying, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are



being saved it is the power of God” and later, “We are fools for Christ’s sake.” When we celebrate Easter and Jesus’ rising from the dead, we declare that we are Holy Fools; that we have hope, and always will, because we believe God’s love triumphed over evil and death through the resurrection of the Christ.

Being a Holy Fool doesn’t mean that we ignore reality, or deny what we see in the world; this would be a fake, insincere hope, which makes Christianity appear simple and ignorant; being Fools for Christ’s sake means that we are willing to confuse and astound people when we take in all of reality, all the mess and cruelty and ugliness of the world and *still* proclaim, “I believe God is bigger than all of this.”

So my invitation to you, as I send you off into your life in this sixth and final week of Lent, is to practice being a Holy Fool, such that even when you don’t *feel* hopeful, when things seem dark and desolate, you still *behave* hopefully, by making choices that are rooted not in fear, but in the hope of the Resurrection. Holy Fools are those who are willing to boldly contradict the voice of despair that says evil has won. We need people in this world who still believe that picking up a piece of litter matters, that giving a homeless person a sandwich changes something; that every small act of kindness somehow contributes to the healing of the whole world. We say we believe in the Resurrection; now let’s act like it.

I’ll leave you today with these wise words from the artist Vincent Van Gogh:

“Many people seem to think it foolish, even superstitious, to believe that the world could still change for the better. And it is true that in winter it is sometimes so biting cold that one is tempted to say, ‘What do I care if there is a summer; its warmth is no help to me now.’ Yes, evil often seems to surpass good. But then, in spite of us, and without our permission, there comes at last an end to the bitter frosts. One morning the wind turns, and there is a thaw. And so I must still have hope.” – Vincent Van Gogh

May the hope of Christ fill you and enfold you in this sixth week of Lent. I’m Tara Ludwig, thank you so much for joining us this year for the Lenten Meditations. With gratitude, all of us at the Faber Institute wish you a blessed and joyful Easter. Amen.