

Today we celebrate the joy of the resurrection and the knowledge that in Christ's victory over death, we have been given the promise of new and everlasting life. But the elation we feel now has come to us only after a period of deep reflection, self-examination and a challenge that calls us to confront the most tragic story ever told. The art work that hangs on our church walls tell this story, the story of Jesus' last journey on his way to Calvary and death upon a cross. It is a deeply disturbing tale that reveals the worst of our humanity, as it exposes our unimaginable cruelty and shows the depraved lengths we can go to when we dehumanize others. This story, the Way of the Cross, reveals the brokenness of humanity and our tendency to ignore inconvenient truths and to look away from painful scenes that make us uncomfortable.

Indeed, human beings are expert at avoiding the disturbing. We live in denial, because the truth is often just too difficult for us to bear. So, we look away and pretend that we don't see. Even though the cruelty and pain all around us demand our attention and call us to action. Instead, we often opt to stay safe and untroubled in our bubbles of isolation and leave the things that we should do, go undone. Why? Because we are frightened, and confused, and weak, and self-centered, and broken. This is true of us now, and it has been true of human beings from the time of our very creation. That's why tragedies marked by cruelty, hatred, violence and neglect are allowed to happen.

We don't step forward to stop such injustices, such wrongs, that occur in our world, some right under our very noses, because we humans never have – not generally speaking anyway, not most of us, most of the time. Oh, sure, the brave, selfless few among us, the prophets and saints, have always acted against such injustices as well as those throughout the ages whose voices have been silenced by the powerful, the millions upon millions of people marginalized by oppression, prejudice, poverty and subjugation, but not the rest of us, not those of us who benefit from some privilege and power. We retreat, instead, to our safe places far removed from the pain and suffering of this world.

And so...a bully goes unchecked on the playground, tormenting other children at will, because no one, not even an adult, will step forward to say “Stop, Enough!”

And so... a boss brow beats, intimidates and perhaps even sexually harasses staff members. Co-workers may know that unacceptable behavior is going on but they back away in silence – they may think “Stop, Enough!” but they utter no words, because to do so might cost them their jobs, compromising their security.

And so...rogue nations attack and invade neighbors with impunity, because calling them out and putting muscle behind the words “Stop, Enough!” would

force a reluctant international community to set aside perceived national interests and take a stand on principle instead.

And so...in our own country we allow the ugliest, loudest, voices to get their way and to successfully spread misinformation and lies, because many of us in our malaise and fatigue are too weary to shout “Stop, Enough!” having convinced ourselves that a call to action will change little.

And so...we do nothing, allowing the tragedy to continue and worsen.

Humanity has a long and shameful history of allowing the bullies in this world to win and those unjustly accused to suffer. It has always been like this; just as it was on that day in Jerusalem nearly 2000 years ago when Jesus, the innocent, was condemned to death and was whipped and struck and spit upon, forced to carry an unbearable weight while he struggled alone through the streets, lined with people laughing at him, enjoying his agony and pain, who cheered as blood poured from his head because of the mock crown he was forced to wear, its razor sharp thorns piercing his skin.

No, no one shouted “Stop, Enough!” It didn’t happen then and it doesn’t happen now. So, the cycle of tragedy carries on unbroken, for Jesus’ painful journey is reenacted every time cruelty, injustice, oppression, violence, prejudice and neglect is allowed to go on in this world unchecked.

But is humanity condemned to a future marked by this hopeless vision of the past; one that is to be repeated forever? The Easter story says “No!” For the tragedy of the day of Jesus’ crucifixion is meaningless if it does not point us to the resurrection and to hope. For without the resurrection, Jesus’ passion is just one more example of human cruelty among the countless examples that we experience every day. But, the resurrection changes everything; for if there is resurrection, if Jesus’ suffering and pain leads us to new life, then we have another chance to get things right. We all do. If there is resurrection, then there is hope; hope that this cycle of tragedy can be broken; hope that people will have the courage to stand up and say “Stop, Enough!” And maybe, just maybe we’re beginning to turn a corner toward that hope.

Perhaps, the recent March for our Lives was an example of a movement that will help break this cycle. Maybe the “Me Too” movement, Black Lives matter and the Women’s March last year were also examples of such a phenomenon, ones that in their advocacy for justice and peace stretch back over time to that righteous soul, our savior, Jesus Christ, who stood up, faced oppression, and said “Stop, Enough!” Perhaps, what we’re seeing today reflects a momentum that though slow in its development embraces the many movements that came before, where the few and the brave, walking in God’s ways, were able to make a difference in their worlds

and contribute to the strength of our conviction to correct the wrongs of the past and build a future grounded in love.

Perhaps those today who are called to rise up and say “Stop. Enough!” are descendants of those who fought for the rights of workers, who opposed slavery, who fought for freedom from colonial powers, who marched for civil rights, who advocated for the LGBTQ community, and who do so even today; saints whose connection to goodness, that is to say Godliness, helped inspire all of the other movements throughout history and across the globe where people rose up to demand that their human integrity be respected.

If this is true, then there is true cause for hope. For the good news of Easter is not only that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead and lives now, but also that the power of the resurrection can transform our lives. New life is possible, right now, right here, today. But for that to happen, we need not only to be reminded of resurrection, but also to practice resurrection.

We are an Easter people, a community of hope and promise, conscious of the interconnectedness of all people, who acknowledge our dependence on each other, and share the belief that as children of God we are part of a family that embraces all people. And we live into this resurrection by honoring our

baptismal covenant which calls upon us to love our neighbors, to seek and serve Christ in all – *all* – others, to strive for justice and peace among *all* people, and respect the dignity of *every* human being. Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. He is alive in us, in our acts of kindness, charity and hospitality, in our love for each other, in the tears we shed and in the joys we share, in our desire to know God's truth and to walk in God's ways.

The message of Easter is that the promise of new life doesn't just await us in the future but is here for us now. Does this mean that pain and suffering in this world are no more? Unfortunately, not, but new life means that we have a different way of addressing these tragedies and challenges. Our new life in Christ emboldens us to demand change and to forcefully through word and example call for a halt to cruelty and neglect, to oppression and hatred, to self-centeredness and exclusion. But how to we attain this conviction?

Through Love! Because in the experience of resurrection are hearts are transformed by love, a transformation that occurs because God so loved us that God came among us in the person of Jesus and taught us a new way to live, and modeled for us what human potential for love and compassion could

be, and suffered and died for us to free us from our bondage to human brokenness, and rose again to offer us the promise of eternal life.

The resurrection places us on a path toward God, a path that leads to a new way of living, where, as disciples of Christ, committed to the love and care for all people, whether they are Christians or not, whether they are people of faith or not, we find ourselves inspired by Christ's life and are transformed by the power of Christ's glorious resurrection. This propels us onward in newness of life, to walk in God's ways and to live the lives for which God created us.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! Now, let us go into the world in peace, as part of a new creation, devoted to love and compassion for all. Amen