

For many, the suffering of the world comes painfully close. Two of our friends have shared the difficulty a child of theirs is in with alcoholism. Our grandsons' piano teacher is a Ukrainian refugee. Her mother and brother live in Kiev. She's frightened.

As Lutherans we're close to Palestinian struggles as Palestinian pastors serve in our churchwide offices. We're also in dialog with Reform Jews. Cancer surgeries are upcoming for some. Family stresses exist for others.

LCM's Prayer Group keeps busy surrounding you with prayer. Keep letting us know your concerns. St. Paul certainly knew of suffering. In fact, all three readings today do, and yet they name resurrection as our central reality; our reason to "not lose heart," as Carol read in II Cor. *"We do not lose heart since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in ministry"* – a ministry grounded in resurrection hope."

Resurrection isn't just for Easter. It's for this last Sunday of Epiphany – Transfiguration. It's also for Lent – which begins Wednesday.

Resurrection shapes every day and all seasons – the easy and the difficult – if we'll have it. St. Paul gets it when he alludes to Genesis 1. The Spirit hovers over the abyss and a voice says, "Let there be light." And there was light. Everything is transfigured by the intervention of God.

You've noticed how everything looks different when you turn lights on in a dark room. I love getting up while it's dark – especially when we have a Christmas tree up and I get to shatter the darkness with twinkly tree lights. The dark room is transformed by the tiniest of bulbs.

This year our cut tree is still up – and not yet brown. I've kept it well watered and shaded, though it needs to come down and will by Ash Wednesday. It's still Epiphany till then.

But Lent comes and with purpose. Lent acknowledges suffering is a part of life. Clouds shroud the light and may even make the light seem extinguished.

Lent dampens our singing Alleluia not because we shouldn't always praise God. Setting aside Alleluias is because that's how life is. We're not always up for Alleluias. Life isn't always rosy. Life is sometimes hard.

Some struggle with how or even why keep going. Lent is important spiritually because life happens. Lament is needed.

Life as it is and as it ought to be, or as we wish it were, don't always match up. My friend Pastor Gerry's brother Richard was Campus Pastor of Augustana College in Rock Island. He shared a story in Augustana's newsletter of a family with a kitty. The kitty grew quickly and got out of its comfy box. They couldn't find it. They searched the house. One family member had a meeting and drove the car out of the driveway. Then they found the kitty. Too late. Life had happened.

Life is happening all the time. Listening to the news confirms it. We may not want to listen or need to monitor our listening. But it is into this world that God sends us. We're not to completely close our ears or hearts. God calls us to let light shine from our faces – to be living reminders of God who called light to “shine out of darkness.”

It's often outside our choosing that clouds appear in life. They're often not our fault. And try as we might, we can't always turn the lights on. We may barely remember where the switch is. There can be days when light just isn't within reach. This is why Lent.

Lent reminds us to embrace our humanity; to give thanks that our created lives are precious and God who never stops gazing on us with love.

Lent's words, “Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return” are not a put down. They're a reality check. We're earthen vessels. We crack and chip and when we're dropped by whatever force, we may break. But God doesn't miss a beat. Resurrection is God's way.

C.S. Lewis names this in the Chronicles of Narnia. The children ask why it seems always to be winter and never Christmas. But then snow thaws and flowers emerge and a party is had. Life flows from perplexities to the realization we need “not be driven to despair,” as St. Paul says.

Life can seem like winter with no Christmas – but the Biblical story from Genesis to Revelation tells of God's endless interest in both Christmas and Easter – in being born among us and in raising the dead. Creation is deeply treasured by God!

To be sure, succession happens. Mantels are passed on. II Kings tells of Elijah the prophet giving way to the upstart Elisha. We rise and fall. But rising and falling are both done in God who hovers over it all. Moses dies. Elijah is taken by a whirlwind. But both are seen again in Mark 9.

In today's Transfiguration story Jesus, Elijah, and Moses have a cross-generational encounter. A thousand or more years separate them yet there they are. It's as if God wants us to hear that worry about eternity is not our worry. God's got eternity. Moses is recognizably still Moses. Elijah is still Elijah post-whirlwind.

But Simon Peter's suggestion they make booths to make that glimpse of eternity graspable doesn't fly. Jesus isn't interested. Jesus trusts God holds the future.

What Jesus wants is partners who will trust God too and humbly join Jesus in being people on earth for this time and era; this moment for us to be means through which God moves in history.

Now is God's good time for you, for me, for LCM. That the Church Year includes Lent says God is present in hard times too. The life, death, and resurrection of our beautiful Savior is why we never need to lose heart.

We're Christmas and Easter people, always, even in Lent! Praise God.

Amen

ELW **838** *Beautiful Savior*

+*Pastor Peg*, LCM, LA