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Good Lent!

By Larry A. Peters

Sing His Bleeding Love: Hymns and Church Music for Lent and Easter

By Kevin J. Hildebrand

Easter: Life Overcoming Death

By Gifford A. Grobien

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PUBLISHER
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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture verses are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Cover Photo: Luther Statue on Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne Campus. By Richard Woodward.

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By Larry A. Peters

Good Lent is time spent renewing our focus upon the Six Chief Parts, preaching and praying the small catechism and refreshing our faith. We spend the whole year doing more with less time; Lent offers us a chance to do more with a bit more time and latitude granted to us by the hearers in the pew.

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By Kevin J. Hildebrand

The church looks different in Lent, with violet paraments in the chancel and on the pastor's vestments. The church sounds different. We omit singing "Alleluia," and we hear music that we do not hear other times of the year. . . . Easter, with its dazzling white paraments, plenty of lilies, and festive music from churches large and small, provides a feast for the senses beginning at the Easter Vigil and then magnifying on Easter morning.

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By Gifford A. Grobien

This hope of new life in Christ—this is how the Christians of old faced the wickedness of their time. Although the world seemed to be crumbling around them, they did not despair, for they knew that their lives and the world itself was being remade in Christ. For us, too, the resurrection of Christ gives us an indomitable hope, no matter the social or personal trials we suffer.

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Easter: LIFE Overcoming Death

By Gifford A. Grobien

The first century Roman Empire suffered from the same kinds of corruption which eat away at all nations, including our own. Sexual immorality, perversion of marriage and abortion were acceptable practices. The economy was structured to serve those who were already well-to-do. Yet, in the midst of all that corruption, something unique came to pass in those days: the coming of God in the flesh and His subsequent death on the cross and His resurrection. In the midst of the corruption, suffering and despair of the greatest empire, the light of hope was ignited. This light of the resurrection brought a profound and systemic change to the perspective of those who received this light and were reborn into the new life of Christ.

It was into this world, a world of immorality, death and economic injustice—a world not so morally different from our own—that the Son of God was born. And what hope or change did He bring? To the perception of some, perhaps very little. Jesus Christ did not coerce people into changing. He did not come with the wrath of divine glory to bring punishment. He did not send forth His armies to quell rebellions and intimidate nations into subjection to Him. He came humbly, in a vulnerable human body, to appeal to the people with His divine grace, with His patient mercy and with forgiveness of sins. In almost every way He was the opposite of the Roman imperial structure. Because He came humble and vulnerable, He could be opposed—both His message and His person. The wickedness of the world seemed to have its way with Him, putting Him to death on a cross.

Yet He deigned to be vulnerable, His divine power could not be overcome. The author of life—the very living One—could not be conquered by death. Just as darkness is scattered before light, so death is nothing before life. God in His body raised Himself again to life to dispel all death before Him.

Christ's resurrection did not benefit only Himself. Just as He came among people to offer His divine grace, mercy and forgiveness, so, in His resurrection He offers to all resurrection from the dead: “[I]n fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

Eternal life in a resurrected, perfected body is for all who belong to Christ. You belong to Christ through baptism! “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4). Christ's resurrection assures us of new, resurrected life with Christ after our earthly death.

Yet, this new resurrected life already begins in this world. It begins with baptism, as the passage from Romans states. Certainly this new life is hidden in many ways. Our bodies are not resurrected yet, and they suffer from many things: illness, injury, emotional suffering and pain in hurt relationships. Yet, Christians in the early centuries of the church demonstrated in their lives how the eternal life of the resurrection was already

beginning in Christ's life in them. Converts to Christianity abandoned a life of wickedness. Christians no longer took part in the assumed and institutionalized wickedness of Rome—the prostitution and immorality, the abortion and the financial abuse. Adulterers, murderers, the greedy, the gossiping, the atheists and idolaters: such evil actions which dominated the lives of many ceased.

Moreover, the resurrection gave a true hope and fearlessness to Christians in the face of the wickedness of others. The immorality, the death, the greed and injustice—these were nothing in light of the life of the coming kingdom in Christ. Even death itself was no longer feared. Death was not an end; it did not mean the cutting off of life. New life in a resurrected body awaited all Christians, so that whether death came quietly in old age, or suddenly due to illness or

persecution, it was no longer a significant threat.

This hope of new life in Christ—this is how the Christians of old faced the wickedness of their time. Although the world seemed to be crumbling around them, they did not despair, for they knew that their lives and the world itself were being remade in Christ.

For us, too, the resurrection of Christ gives us an indomitable hope, no matter the social or personal trials we suffer. In the face of immorality, death and injustice around you, you can persist and act in the hope that Christ died and rose for you. The destruction and despair that the world tries to sow are overturned in the new kingdom of Christ.

Every generation of Christians faces wickedness in the world. Many even face persecution and threat of death. As our own world embraces more blatantly again similar kinds of immorality, death

and corruption faced by the Christians in the Roman Empire, we Christians will find ourselves in greater conflict with the world. We may even find ourselves being threatened to give up our faith, to recant our confession in the resurrected Lord. Should that day ever come, we have the reminder of the ancient martyrs of old, that in Christ, only death truly dies. In Christ, we live. In Christ, we prefer to die rather than to deny our faith in Christ, knowing that when we die, we do not perish but become incorruptible through the resurrection. 🏰

The Rev. Dr. Gifford A. Grobien (Gifford.Grobien@ctsfw.edu) serves as assistant professor of Systematic Theology and director of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.



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