

Rebirth: “Ongoing Conversion”  
“Be Enlivened, Enriched, And Encouraged  
Jeremiah 31:1-6  
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24  
Colossians 3:1-4  
John 20:1-18

Do not regress into the past, but move toward the future promised in God. In his book *Abba’s Child*, Brennan Manning writes, “Without deliberate awareness of the present risenness of Jesus, life is nonsense, all activity useless, all relationships in vain.”<sup>1</sup>

Why do we want to hold on to the past? We’re nostalgic for what was. We are adverse to change. Many churches are struggling and declining around the country. We’re naturally wired to hearken back to the days of robust growth and participation and attempt to recreate that buzz. Holding on to the past, or regressing back to the past is not healthy. As Brennan Manning so clearly focuses us on this Easter Sunday writes, “Without deliberate awareness of the present risenness of Jesus, life is nonsense, all activity useless, all relationships in vain.”<sup>2</sup> The new life promised by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, makes the clarion call to let go of the past and focus on how Jesus’ resurrection promises new life, healing, and dynamic Christian living. We must examine the demographics of society, neighborhoods, and church communities of faith. God is doing something new, and regressing to the past roots us in the old, which promises demise.

Psalm 118:1 reads, “O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!” This Psalm is recited at Passover every year. Kimberly Bracken Long,

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<sup>1</sup>Brennan Manning, *Abba’s Child*, 110.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Assistant Professor of Worship at Columbia Theological Seminary writes, “[The recitation of Psalm 118] celebrates God’s past triumph of delivering the Hebrew slaves, acknowledges some present threat, and expresses hope for future deliverance.”<sup>3</sup> Our brothers and sisters in Judaism began Passover on April 5<sup>th</sup> and it concludes April 13<sup>th</sup>. During Passover, our brothers and sisters in Judaism recount God’s triumphs and express hope for future deliverances. Beginning last Sunday, Palm Sunday, and continuing through Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and yes, today, Christians seize the truth that God is for humanity and not against it, as we look for God’s presence and deliverance in the challenges we face as individuals and communities.

This is the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus himself told the world that if he was killed, he would be raised from the dead. Love would win. Death in all its forms would lose. Tony Campolo tells the story of a Good Friday service some years back at his home church in West Philadelphia. Good Friday is the day in the church year that followers of Jesus around the world remember his death on the cross.

Tony was one of seven ministers, each preaching on one of the seven last words of Jesus. After Tony sat down at the end of his message, the pastor of the congregation squeezed Tony’s knee and said, “You did all right, boy!” Tony turned to him and said, “Pastor, are you going to be able to top that?” Tony states that the old man smiled at him and said, “Son, you just sit back, ‘cause this old man is going to do you in!” And then it began.

In black congregations, the people really get into the message. If you are doing poorly people might yell, “Help him Jesus! Help him, Jesus.” On the other hand, when the preacher is really on, deacons start yelling, “Preach, brother! Preach, brother! Preach, man, preach!” Other words that are heard during a good sermon are “doing good,” “Well, well,” and “Keep going! Keep going!”

And so, the old man began to preach. The pastor only had one line in his sermon. “It’s Friday, but Sunday’s comin’!” He started the sermon very softly by saying, “It was Friday; it was Friday and my Jesus was dead on the tree. But that was

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<sup>3</sup>Kimberly Bracken Long in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 2 (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 359.

Friday, and Sunday's comin'!" "It was Friday and Mary was cryin' her eyes out. The disciples were runnin' in every direction, like sheep without a shepherd, but that was Friday, and Sunday's comin'!" "It was Friday. The cynics were lookin' at the world and sayin', 'As things have been so they shall be. You can't change anything in this world; you can't change anything.' But those cynics didn't know that it was only Friday. Sunday's comin'!" "It was Friday! And on Friday, those forces that oppress the poor and make the poor to suffer were in control. But that was Friday! Sunday's comin'!" "It was Friday, and on Friday Pilate thought he had washed his hands of a lot of trouble. The Pharisees were struttin' around, laughin' and pokin' each other in the ribs. They thought they were back in charge of things, but they didn't know that it was only Friday! Sunday's comin'!" "It's Friday, but Sunday's comin'! It's Friday, but Sunday's comin'!" It's Friday, but Sunday's comin'!"

At the end of his message he just yelled at the top of his lungs, "IT'S FRIDAY!" And all the congregants yelled back with one accord, "SUNDAY'S COMIN'!"<sup>4</sup>

Jeremiah 31:1-6, Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, Colossians 3:1-4, and John 20:1-18 all declare that death loses, and love wins.

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 is the promise that love wins. Banking our hope on the prophecy in in this text that the messiah would not die but would live, is what each one of us is looking for today. Love wins!

The gospel reading in John 20:1-18 tells us how death loses. Who was Mary looking for when she went to the tomb that early morning? The stone had been rolled away. The tomb was empty. The linen cloths were all that remained. Jesus' body was gone. Mary had many questions rolling around in her head. Had the Roman guards stolen the body to mock Jesus publicly in the streets? Did some of the disciples take Jesus' body to make it look like he had risen from the dead? Had she gone to the wrong tomb? Had Jesus only fainted on the cross, later waking and walking out of the tomb? Mary lingered around the tomb grieving and trying to hold onto the past the best she could. And then she heard Jesus call her name. The resurrection happened. Yet, the Pharisees were

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<sup>4</sup>Anthony Campolo, *It's Friday, but Sunday's Comin'* (Waco, Texas: WORD Books, 1984), 118-119.

struttin' around, laughin', and pokin' each other in the ribs. They thought they were back in charge of things, but they didn't know that it was only Friday! Sunday's comin'!" "It's Friday, but Sunday's comin'! Sunday's here! Death loses!"<sup>5</sup>

Death was defeated on the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus. God's labor of restoration involves reconciliation between those who are divided. This work of restoration and reconciliation continues until the last day when the trumpet sounds. The love God has for you is made manifest in the risen One, the One who knows you the best and loves you the most. Jesus, the risen One is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning, and the end. The risen One, Jesus Christ, is always front and center, beckoning you to let go of the past and allow him to live his life through you to usher in the new way of living and being church. The risen One, Jesus Christ, is your hope.

Do not regress into the past, but move toward the future promised in God. Love wins! Death loses! Resurrection Sunday should enliven, enrich, and encourage your soul. New life is now. Accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Renew your relationship with Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Jesus' resurrection from the dead sealed the win for love and the loss for death. Salvation now from all that is deadly and salvation for eternity can be yours today. Sunday's here. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person and Livestream congregations)  
on Sunday, 9 April 2023 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh  
at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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<sup>5</sup>In the three paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of James C. Howell, John C. Holbert, David Gambrell, Edith M. Humphrey, Cathy Caldwell Hoop, Thomas G. Long, and Jonathan L. Walton as found in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 182-194, 182-186, 187-189, 190-192, 192-194, 195-197, and 197-199.