

Preaching the Easter Texts: Can I Get a Witness?

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Can I get a witness?

It is the question that should be raised for and by preachers as Easter approaches. In an Easter sermon, Barbara Brown Taylor points out how extraordinary the Easter claim is that God has raised Jesus from the dead.¹ This is not a message that we could have ever imagined. It is not the natural turn of events, business as usual, what we expect. People who die stay dead! That is the way the world functions. Now we have to stand up and bear witness to a different reality. It is not our task to explain something that defies conventional wisdom and reality. Often during a sermon in an African American church, the preacher will make a point and then ask the congregation, “Can I get a witness?” A witness is, by definition, one who bears testimony about things she or he has seen, heard, or experienced.

Our job is not to present a logical proof that Jesus was raised from the dead. It is our task to bear witness to the resurrection. These amazing stories that stand at the heart of our faith defy our expectations and imagination. So we need a few good people with the courage and faith to stand up at the witness stand (pulpit) to give testimony to the incredible news of what God has done by raising Jesus from the dead, overcoming the power of death, and what this means for our lives and the world.

“Can I get a witness?”

During the fiftieth anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the story is told of how Martin Luther King, Jr. felt the anxiety of delivering the most important speech of his life. King was in a quandary about what to say to the diverse crowd gathered on that hot day of August 28, 1963. He had his “A Dream” speech that he had delivered to other groups. Some of his advisors told him not to use it, so he worked on a fresh analysis of the situation faced by African Americans seeking freedom and justice in our country. Martin Luther King, Jr. had just begun his speech when Mahalia Jackson, who was sitting on the podium near Dr. King, shouted out: “Tell them about the Dream, Martin! Tell them about the Dream!” So he launched into the “I Have a Dream” speech, which changed our world and continues to encourage us.

“Can I get a witness?” Our task as Easter preachers is to take up the challenge to bear witness: “Tell them about God who raised Jesus and who gives us hope! Tell them about what God is doing here, right now! Be witness to a God whose love can be trusted and never ends!”

Matthew 28:1-10—Easter Sunday

According to Matthew’s account, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were not only the first witnesses to the resurrection, but they also preached the first Easter sermon. Maybe you find it as ironic as I do that Christian churches have denied women the right to tell the Easter story in worship for centuries, and some still do! We would not have the incredible good news without their witness.

In Matthew, we get the Cecil B. DeMille spectacular version with an earthquake, a lot of noise, an angel rolling the stone away and sitting on it. I love the confusion, the running back and forth. I love the skepticism. I love the sense that human beings are trying to understand what they just experienced, trying to appropriate something that doesn't square with what they know about life and death. The text says, "They went out with fear and great joy." Fear and great joy! These mixed emotions make sense. Human beings, like you and me, are witnesses to something beyond our understanding of reality. If it is true, *wow!* What does it mean for how we live?

We know how to live in a Good Friday world where innocent people get killed and the weak get stepped on, but to live in a world where love is victorious over hate, where hope is stronger than despair, is difficult, a challenge to conventional wisdom. It takes us to the heart of the Gospel. It takes us to the profound matter of what we believe. In the face of the reality we often experience as threatening, painful, and disappointing, Easter proclaims a reality that is God whose love is stronger than the harsh realities we encounter. Easter invites us to trust in the living God.

"Do not be afraid!" How many times throughout the Bible do we hear these words? Several times in the Easter text, we are encouraged to set aside our fears. Isn't that like asking us to jump out of our skin? "Fear not" in a world like this when we know ourselves to be vulnerable human beings. William Faulkner, the great southern novelist, once wrote, "The basis of all things is to be afraid." You have seen the pictures of people fleeing from bombs, guarding themselves from tornados and hurricanes and all kinds of other calamities. "Fear not," as we grow older and face the prospects of aging and our own death. "Fear not," when we await the results of that exam to tell us what is wrong with us. "Fear not," as we grieve the deaths of those we love.

We are afraid. God knows we are afraid. So the first thing is to acknowledge our fears. My son, Bankston, used to tell me when I was avoiding some truth or reality I did not want to deal with, "Dad, you are traveling down the longest river in Egypt." I said, "What?" He said, "Yes, you're in de Nile (denial)!" We deny a basic part of who we are when we deny our fear. I am so glad that the story of the resurrection said, "With fear and great joy they went out." Our fear changes focus as we see the angel using the death stone as a stool. As we feel the earth shake beneath us, our fear is still there, but only in another form. Death has lost its sting.

What calms our fear is the promise that God can be trusted to be with us, to save us, to overcome the powers of death. The earth shook on Easter because resurrection means God is at the boundaries of our existence. We do not have to live in fear or be controlled by our fears. As "The Brief Statement of Faith" puts it, "In life as in death, we belong to God."² It is a source of deep joy to know that God can be trusted.

Seamus Heaney, the remarkable Irish poet, died in 2013. His poetry has been an inspiration to people around the globe. His final act was remarkable. Minutes before his death in the hospital, he sent a text message to his wife, Marie. It simply read, "*Noli timere*," which in Latin means "Do not be afraid." He got it. This man, who was a genius with words, in his final words in Latin used social media to bear witness to the essence of the Easter story.

John 20:19-31—Easter II

"You must be relieved now that Easter is over." It is a remark I often heard as a pastor over the years. This is true if Easter is a day when we pull out all the stops,

celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord. If that is what Easter means, then Easter is over. The Second Sunday of Easter is affectionately called “Low Sunday” because there is usually more room in the sanctuary. But the Easter reality is not over. I love Low Sunday because those who come back are ready to raise the question of what to do with the Easter message that “the Lord is risen.”

You and I have a decision to make: either the facts of life are set—you are born, you grow up, you live your life, and then you die—and there is nothing to do but grab what you can in the time you have left, or if the Resurrection makes a difference, if it is the defining moment in human history, if the Lord is risen indeed, then there is a whole other agenda set before us. We have to decide if we want to stay on this road of following him to the end. If we want to follow not just to the cross and to the empty tomb where the women discover that Jesus was not there, but if we want to follow him into the implications of the new reality, Christ is risen.

We meet the disciples locked in a room. The word was out that Jesus was back. What did this mean for them? The primary feelings of those disciples gathered in that room were bewilderment and uncertainty. We all know what that feels like. Something dramatic happens in your life. There is a major change in what you were expecting. Where do we go from here? What does it mean for us that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead? Suddenly, the Risen Christ appeared to them. Remember, this is one of his first appearances after his resurrection. He doesn’t ask them “Where were you when I needed you? Why did you desert me? Why weren’t you there to the bitter end?” Instead, what he says to them is simply, “Peace be with you. *Shalom*. May the fullness of God’s presence be with you.” No condemnation, no “I told you so.”

Easter is a story about forgiveness. The Risen Christ bears witness to the power of forgiveness. We affirm that forgiveness is at the heart of faith every time we say the Apostles’ Creed. But how hard is it to practice forgiveness? Every once in a while, someone comes along to remind us how transforming forgiveness can be to individual relationships, to nations, and to the human family. At the death in December of Nelson Mandela who had gone from serving 27 years in prison to becoming the first elected president of the new South Africa after apartheid, we were reminded of how forgiveness is at the heart of his gift and legacy to us.

In June 1995, when the South African rugby team which had been a symbol of white supremacy in the country won a huge match in the World Cup final, Mandela walked onto the field wearing the green jersey of the team. At the time of Mandela’s death, columnist Leonard Pitts wrote,

Mandela forgave. He forgave the government that segregated him to the margins of society and made him an outsider in his own country. He forgave the jailers who tried to break his body and spirit during his long incarceration. He forgave his country for hating him.³

In forming the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he worked to enable a process for genuine healing to take place. His ability to forgive provided the world with a powerful witness.

But then there is the problem of Thomas, known to us better by the nickname “Doubting Thomas.” Thomas is a fascinating character. He is one of those people who was not an automatic follower. You don’t just hand him the script, and then he

does what comes next. He wants to know why. And then he's also very honest. He is willing to ask tough questions. There is a Thomas in every group. I dare to assume there is even some of Thomas in all of us.

"Low Sunday" is a good time to face up to our doubts. If you're sitting on the doubter's bench, you are in good company. Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith. We all see through a glass darkly. We move forward toward the day when we will see face-to-face. One of my friends in the ministry, Jim Lowry, calls it raw hope. He said, "Raw hope begins when you have the courage to question, the courage to deal with your honest doubts." Thomas is not thrown out of the community; he is accepted by our Lord, doubts and all.

Luke 24:13-35—Easter III

It was on the Emmaus Road that the Risen Lord joined a couple of his disciples, and they did not recognize him. They were having an extended conversation about what had gone on in Jerusalem in the past week, and the disciples still did not get it. Then he opened the scriptures to them. When they came to a place where they were to stay, he looked like he was going on further. They encouraged him to stay. As they were sitting at table, he took bread and broke it, and they recognized him. Why didn't they know it was Jesus? They had been with him. They had left everything to follow him. They knew his voice. Why didn't they recognize him? I have a mental picture of what I call the "kicking the can exercise." There are two guys walking down the road with their heads down, kicking a can, talking about how bad things are. Ever been there?

Why didn't they recognize him? I have come to think that maybe they didn't recognize him for the reason I don't recognize him. My head is down, and I am preoccupied with what has just happened. They were also unprepared for what was happening. Things like this just don't happen. Remember the Holiday Inn advertisement a few years ago, "The best surprise is no surprise"? That may be good advice for choosing a motel room, but for a way of life, the life best lived is open to the surprises of God.

I am not sure why they were blind to who Jesus is. But I do know there is a blindness within me, that so often I become so preoccupied with myself and with how I am going to get through the day, get this done, get there, that I fail to see what God is doing all around me. Where is our Emmaus Road? Where is the place in our lives where Christ meets us?

The good news is that the Risen Christ is known to us in the breaking of bread. That is what Jesus did. He went around breaking bread. He broke bread with all kinds of people. In fact, one of the charges against him was, "He breaks bread with sinners and with tax collectors." He will break bread with anybody, anytime, anywhere. That is what he did in his ministry, and he still does it. It is at the table of our Lord that our eyes are opened and we recognize him.

John 10:1-10; Psalm 23—Easter IV

Fourth Sunday of Easter is often called "Good Shepherd Sunday." We read Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." We read from John 10, which is entitled "Jesus the Good Shepherd" (NRSV). I extended the reading to the first 18 verses instead of just 10 as the lectionary suggests. The talk is about sheep. In fact,

one member suggested on this Sunday that she thought there were too many sheep in the service. (There is a goat or two in every congregation!) This reminded me of a very embarrassing situation in my ministry. On Good Shepherd Sunday several years ago, I had an unforgettable experience. I had been talking about shepherds and sheep, and I thought I had done a reasonably good job. We were also having a baptism. And so I said to the children as we gathered at the baptismal font, "We have talked a lot about shepherds and sheep this morning, children, and in a few minutes, I'm going to baptize another one of God's sheep." At that point, one of the young girls in a loud voice said, "You're going to do *what*? You're going to baptize a *sheep*?" There was sporadic laughter in the congregation for the remainder of the service, and I learned that day something about literalism and children.

Talking about shepherds and sheep seems a little strange in twenty-first century urban America. What do we know about shepherds and sheep? We live in a world that is not pastoral. Yet, the words "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want..." "I am the Good Shepherd..." "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" resonate with people of all ages and stations in life. The hymn "My Shepherd Will Supply My Need" is one of the most familiar and beloved of the church. But the question arises, Who needs a shepherd and why?

If Jesus is the Good Shepherd, then who are we? That makes us the sheep, the wooly ones. But being a sheep does not sit well, does it? Barbara Brown Taylor writes, "Most of us think of sheep as slobbering, untidy, dumb animals who exist only to be shaved or slaughtered."⁴ Maybe the question should not be who wants to be a sheep? The question is why do we feel vulnerable and in need of someone who will lead us? There are those who would rob us of our identity. Instead of children of God, we are led to believe that we are consumers whose value is in what we possess. We are self-made men and women who are independent, rugged individuals. The thieves and the robbers who masquerade as shepherds steal our birthright as those made in God's image and turn us against each other.

This past summer I spent some time on the Ring of Kerry in Ireland. There, I was able to observe a lot of sheep grazing on the lovely hillsides. I had the chance to get up close and personal with several sheep. I also talked with those who were herding the sheep. I now have it on good authority that sheep are not dumb. I've got it from someone who grew up on a sheep farm in Ireland. In fact, it was suggested to me that the notion that sheep are dumb is a rumor that's been spread by cattle ranchers in Texas who say sheep are dumb because sheep are different. And you know that old saying that if it's different from me and mine and ours, then it must be bad and dumb and no good. We have been victims of that kind of prejudice down through the centuries and up to the present day.

Let me tell you what the difference is. Cows are herded from the rear by cowboys cracking whips. In other words, they get behind the cattle to get and keep them moving. This will not work with sheep. If you try standing behind sheep making loud noises, they will go crazy trying to get behind you. Sheep prefer to be led. You push cows, but you lead sheep. Sheep will not go anywhere if someone else does not go first. They need a shepherd who will go ahead of them to show them that things are all right. "The wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away" (John 10:12-13).

Who needs a shepherd? Who needs someone to go, to guide, to show the way?

One who says, “I am the gate” or “I am the door”; “It is through me that you understand the value of life, that you understand what’s going on in this world. It is through me that you find abundant life, life that enables you to accept one another with our differences.”

I have a dear friend who developed a brain tumor. He was facing serious surgery. As he was going into the operating room, one of the nurses standing beside him asked, “Is there anything I can do for you?” He asked, “Do you know the Twenty-third Psalm?” She said, “Yes.” And they began to recite it together, and the doctors going in with them joined them: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.... Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Ps. 23:1, 4).

A young man whom I had never met stopped by the church I was serving in Louisville, Kentucky. I was new in ministry. He was a Presbyterian from another town and wanted a pastor to visit his mother who was dying in a hospital room downtown. I went, not sure what in the world I would say or do. His mother was barely present when I entered the room, her bed surrounded by family members. She whispered to ask if I would recite Psalm Twenty-three and pray. I did, and she smiled. The Good Shepherd was not on a hillside in some far away land, but in a hospital room with a dying woman and a frightened young pastor. Over the years, this experience has been replicated for me and countless others. Shepherd talk may sound a bit strange in an urban society, but it speaks to a great need in our lives. In a world of so many crazy episodes, who needs a Good Shepherd? I do! What about you?

“Can I get a witness?”

John 14:1-14—Easter V

God is not easy for us to behold. Our Hebrew ancestors thought it was a fearful thing to gaze upon the glory of God. For them, God is holy, distant, and unapproachable. The Jews believed that if you could see God face to face, God would be an object under our control that we could manipulate and use. Do you get the picture? God has been seen as unapproachable.

You may have heard about the young girl who was a budding artist. She loved to draw. One day her father came home to find her working on a picture. “What are you drawing?” he asked. “God,” she replied. “That is interesting,” he responded, “since no one knows what God looks like.” “They will when I finish this drawing,” she answered. In the back of our minds, each of us has an image of God, what God looks like. Some see a kindly old man in the sky, or maybe you see God in a beautiful sunset. “The Brief Statement of Faith” says, “Like a mother God cares for God’s children, like a father God welcomes our home coming.” We draw images from our experience. All of our images don’t quite capture the essence of God.

In his farewell discourse as Jesus is preparing his disciples for his death, his going away, Jesus says a remarkable thing. In response to a request from Philip, “Show us the father and we will be satisfied,” Jesus replied, “Have I been with you so long and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father!” (John 14:8-9). If you want to know what God looks like, take a look at Jesus. Take a look at his acts of compassion, his devotion to the truth, his willingness to lay down his life for his friends even when his friends desert him, deny him, and betray him. He is the embodiment of God’s love for us and for the world.

In the afterglow of Easter as we seek to take in the astounding implications of Christ living among us, this Easter season is a good time to look at God through the lens of the One who made God known. Shirley Guthrie is helpful when he writes:

How do we come to know the Creator of heaven and earth? Where do we meet this God personally? In a weak, helpless baby lying in a cradle in a barn! In a Jew who was the friend of dishonest business people, prostitutes, and social outcasts! In a man condemned to die by capital punishment between two thieves! What an inappropriate place to meet “Almighty God”! How Unspiritual! But hidden in the peasant baby, this ancient Jewish preacher, this “criminal” – there is God speaking, acting, personally present. God is not a man, but this man is God-with-us.” Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9) (*Christian Doctrine*, 58, Shirley Guthrie)

Jesus said to Philip, “If you have trouble believing this, look at the works.” In other words, “Look at the things I have done. Look at the way people have been healed and given hope; look at the way people have been given a second chance. Look at what God is doing among you.” This is Jesus who is for us “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). I ride by a church every day that has on its marquee “Jesus Is the Way.” Often Christians have used these words to exclude others who are not Christian. This seems to me to miss the point. Jesus who shows us the way, who is the way, is always opening doors to let others in on the way and expanding the table to make room for others.

We need the way of Jesus to be our way, the truth of God’s expansive love to be our truth. We need this life to offer new life to a world that seems hell bent on self-destruction. We need, with our Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist friends, and neighbors without any faith tradition, to look at each other through the lens of One who gave of himself that the ways of God might flourish and prosper in our world. He came to reconcile us to each other.

Let me be so bold as to suggest that although we do not have a full length portrait of God, what we do have in Jesus of Nazareth is a picture of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is a picture that we carry with us, and it will carry us home. Philip said, “Show us the father, and we will be satisfied.” And Jesus said, “Look at me, Philip. It doesn’t get better than this.”

John 14:14-21 – Easter VI

The Gospel lesson for the Sixth Sunday of Easter is a continuation of Jesus’ farewell discourse. Those who bear witness to the Resurrection will not be left alone. He is preparing the disciples for his departure with the assurance of his continual presence. These are important words for us to hear in the church today. There is so much anxiety about what is ahead in an increasingly secular and pluralistic society. We are told that we live in a post-denominational world, which makes us anxious. How will we be faithful witnesses to the Resurrection in such a time as this?

The actor Hugh Grant starred in a movie titled *About a Boy*. Grant played Will Freeman, a rich London playboy who has made it his goal to live only for himself. Will has a shallow life devoted to clothes, videos, pop music, and other such stuff. He also uses people and sets out to prove John Donne wrong. He is an island unto

himself. In pursuit of this goal, he meets an awkward 12-year-old boy named Marcus. Marcus adopts Will—that's a 12-year-old adopting a young playboy. Marcus goes on to teach Will valuable lessons of life. At one point in the story, when a sudden crisis threatens them, Marcus, the 12-year-old, says to Will, his new best friend, "Two is not enough. We need backup."

All of us have been aware in difficult times of the need for support. Jesus assures us that he will not leave us orphaned. What a powerful image! Jesus is saying, "I've got your back; there is backup." But there is more here. What Jesus describes is an intimate relationship based on love. This is the kind of love that seeks the wellbeing of others and will make sacrifices on behalf of others. It is not a "here today, gone tomorrow" emotion. "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends" (1 Corinthians 13:7–8). Now that sounds like a foundation that is steadfast and trustworthy.

This is what creates a Christian community that has sustaining and staying power. How does it work? What are the practices? Such an intimate and committed relationship is nurtured in worship. In the company of the Body of Christ, we are nurtured. In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about this relationship. "It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world to share in God's Word and Sacrament."⁵ This visible fellowship is also a witness to the presence of the Risen Lord, so every Sunday is a little Easter.

Recently, I heard a sermon by Bishop Porter Taylor, Bishop of the Diocese of Western North Carolina. He told about a conference on liturgy he had attended with other clergy and laity. They were asked to identify the most meaningful part of the liturgy for them. To his dismay, the sermon was not the first choice, although it was important. For the majority, including him, it was the moment in the Eucharist where you hold open your hands to receive the bread of life. It is the moment that acknowledges our dependence on a reality beyond us with the power to nourish and sustain us.

What a fellowship, what a joy divine,
Leaning on the everlasting arms;
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,
Leaning on the everlasting arms.⁶

John 17:1–17—Easter VII

Hear the good news!
Who is in a position to condemn?
Only Christ,
and Christ died for us,
Christ rose for us,
Christ reigns in power for us,
Christ prays for us.

These familiar words from the "Declaration of Forgiveness" in the *Book of Common Worship* (p. 56) affirm that, as the Ascension proclaims, "Christ reigns in power." But that is not all. "Christ prays for us." For some, that is a comforting statement.

Three years ago, I had serious heart surgery to replace a valve and repair an aneurism on my aorta. It meant more to me than I ever imagined to receive word from family, friends, and strangers that they were praying for me.

Prayer is not a rational exercise. There are all sorts of questions reasonable folks could ask about its efficacy. Nevertheless, it matters to know you are being lifted up in prayer. What does it mean that Jesus prays for us? Again, there are a lot of questions one can raise, but it is a source of comfort and strength to know that “Christ prays for us.” Anne Lamott, in her book *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers*, says one of the basic prayers is “Help.” In his prayer in John 17, Jesus prays for help for us. Jesus knows that his followers need help to keep the faith.

The excitement and enthusiasm of Easter Sunday is receding in the rearview mirror. The lilies have faded, the music has toned down, the congregation is smaller. What does this “resurrection business” mean as summer approaches and the problems we face seem more difficult and complex? Jesus does not ignore the harsh realities and challenges that face us as we continue bearing witness to the resurrection. The world around us is not only indifferent; it is hostile. The danger is that as Easter season ends, we breathe a sigh of relief and go back to business as usual, that we will blend into the real world and avoid the challenge of letting our lives bear witness to the Resurrection reality.

In his book *Brother to a Dragonfly*, Will Campbell, a noted Baptist preacher and theologian, recounted a conversation with his irreverent friend P.D. East, which speaks to this danger. The conversation takes place in Alabama during the Civil Rights movement. They had just heard of the killing of a young seminarian, Jonathan Daniels, who was registering black citizens to vote. East complained about the role of the church in those turbulent times; he said the church reminded him of an “Easter chicken.” He then described the baby chicken he had given his little daughter, Karen. The Easter chicken was dyed a deep purple. Will interrupted his friend to remind him that white is the liturgical color for Easter, but P.D. ignored him.

P.D. went on to describe how the baby chicken started feathering, and the new feathers were Rhode Island Red. They took the half-purple, half-red chicken and put it into the chicken yard with the other chickens. At first, the little chicken was different, and the others knew it was different. It did not bother the others or enter into their fights. But little by little it began behaving just like the rest of the chickens. It would peck and fight, knock other chickens down to catch a bug. “And now,” said East, “you can’t tell one chicken from another. They’re all just alike. The Easter chicken is just one more chicken.”

In a world of division and enmity, the transforming power of God’s love in our common life is a powerful witness. Several years ago, I encountered the powers of a faithful witness under difficult circumstances. I was attending an urban ministry conference for Presbyterians working in city ministries. The conference was being held in San Francisco. One of the presenters was a young pastor who was engaged in a street ministry in downtown San Francisco. There were then and still are many young people living on the street in that city. In too many cases, they arrive there because they are gay and have been kicked out by their families. Often they turn to prostitution and get hooked on drugs and alcohol. This pastor walks the streets at night getting to know these young men and women.

He shared several stories with us and talked about how he tries to get to know

them and encourages them to find healthy communities that will offer support. I was fascinated by his presentation and told him so afterwards. He thanked me and then noted that we had a free evening that night. “Would you be interested in joining me as I make my rounds?” he asked. I felt a bit threatened by the prospect, but I accepted.

What followed was one of the most amazing evenings I have ever experienced. In the first place, I discovered early on that he was good at what he did. Over and over as we walked the streets, young men and women would greet him by name and freely talk with him about what was happening in their lives. They obviously considered him a trusted friend. We encountered one young man who seemed uncomfortable about their meeting. When we got back to the young pastor’s small storefront office, I could tell he was discouraged. He shared with me that he had hoped the person we had just met would have been able to turn his life around, but it was evident that he had fallen back into harmful behavior.

“That must be discouraging to you,” I suggested. “Yes,” he responded. After a pause, I asked him, “What enables you to keep going when this happens?” Without hesitation, he responded, “It’s the Resurrection! It’s the Resurrection!” I realized that I had been in the presence of someone who believes that because God raised Jesus from the dead, he is our Good Shepherd. As the Apostle Paul puts it, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God.” I had been with a witness.

Notes

1 Barbara Brown Taylor, “Dust to Dust (Faith Matters),” *The Christian Century* 119, no 7 (March 27, 2002): 32.

2 “The Brief Statement of Faith,” Presbyterian Church (USA).

3 Leonard Pitts, “Forgiveness Lies at the Heart of Mandela Legacy,” *Durham Herald-Sun*, December 10, 2013, A7.

4 Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Cowley Publications: Cambridge, MA, 1993), 140.

5 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 18.

6 “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms,” Text: Elisha A. Hoffman; Music: Anthony J. Showalter. <http://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh133.sht>

7 Anne Lamott, *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012), 15.