

Easter business

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [April 16, 2014](#) issue



St. Peter Preaching by Masolino da Panicale (c. 1383–1440)

It's Easter, and in many churches there will be crowds. Pews will be full to overflowing with worshipers, including many who attend church only once or twice a year. As a pastor I'd always greet them with something like, "If you only attend church once a year, this is the Sunday to be here. The music is powerful, the flowers are gorgeous, and everybody is dressed up and feeling good." There is more to it than that, of course. People come to church on Easter because they know that the subject is the oldest, deepest, most profound question in the human heart. Is there any reason to hope in the face of the inevitability of death? Is there any serious reason, in light of all the violence, suffering, and injustice in the world, to live with hope and resolve and confidence and joy?

A friend sent me a paragraph she wrote for her parish's Lenten devotional: "They all came. So do we. We come to be embraced in the dark hour. We come with regrets that once again we haven't begun to measure up. We come for faith in the future and acceptance of the past. We come, over and over, for a million different reasons,

but we come, finally, to reassure ourselves that we're more than skin and bones."

People come to church on Easter because there is serious business on the agenda. They are not there to hear an explanation of how a dead body got up and walked out of the tomb. We may be tempted to try to explain, but it doesn't work. The four biblical accounts are lean: each tells the story slightly differently and none provides a detailed account of the resurrection itself. It is almost as if they are telling us, like someone who warns us not to look directly at the bright sun, that we should not try to look too directly, that we should perceive this event in a different, deeper way—more heart than mind, more wonder than analysis. Some things are bigger than our ability to say them.

If you must have a little hard evidence, you can do worse than ponder how human beings were transformed: frightened disciples cowering behind a bolted door emerged from hiding as fearless and fierce followers who could not stop talking and singing about what had happened, even in the face of persecution, arrest, and their own martyrdom. What changed cowards into brave disciples was the conviction that their crucified friend was alive. Because death did not defeat him, there was no reason to fear anything, not even death.

What transformed them was the same truth that raised up Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King Jr. It is the same truth that raises up men and women to live with courage and commitment in the midst of illness, oppression, and, of course, the insult of our mortality—the Easter truth that love is stronger than hate and life is stronger than death. The battle has been won. Jesus Christ is risen!