

Reason for hope

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [April 1, 2015](#) issue



Dieric Bouts, [The Entombment](#), circa 1450.

A friend of mine recently announced that he had lost hope for the human race. The news each day was so consistently and relentlessly depressing, he said, that he was certain that the human project had run its course. We might flail about for a few more centuries, but the end of civilization was in sight.

A study published in *Science* magazine last summer announced that global warming is approaching a tipping point after which no reversal will be possible. Marine life will perish, more and more species will become extinct, coastal areas will flood regularly, and there will be more violent weather more often.

Meanwhile ISIS has released a video showing its militants destroying priceless historical artifacts in the Mosul Museum in northern Iraq. This act of cultural genocide reminds me of reports of the sack of Rome in 410 CE. In *The Sack of Rome*,

a painting by Joseph-Noël Sylvestre, two naked Visigoth warriors are climbing a Roman statue and placing a rope around its neck in order to pull it to the ground and destroy it. St. Jerome wrote, "If Rome can perish, what can be safe?"

My analogy may be as hyperbolic as my friend's announcement. Yet there are days when I find myself thinking a lot about his conclusion that there is no hope.

Thank God that Lent is about to become Holy Week and Good Friday and Easter. Once again we'll rehearse the drama we know so well. Peaceful kindness and gracious compassion will again confront the world of power and violent authority. We will again remember that Jesus confronted the political, economic, and social authorities and that in five short days he was arrested and executed.

And yet Easter comes. We believe that although bullies, thugs, and murderers seem to be winning, peace and justice will prevail at the end of the day. We dare to believe that the long arc of history, as Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us, is toward freedom, equality, kindness, justice, and love.

We become fools for Christ because Jesus was still loving and forgiving even as men were driving nails through his wrists and ankles. Because of Easter we dare to believe that the resurrection drama points to God's ultimate authority and power. Death did not defeat Jesus. The power of empire, human hatred, cruelty, and bigotry did not prevail on that dark Friday because three days later, there was Easter.