

More brutal than nature

By [MacKenzie Scott](#)

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In the September 7 issue of the Century, MacKenzie Scott observes that this week's readings find the world's wrongs addressed, but not "by some goddess with a blindfold." Here Scott looks further at the problem of injustice especially as found in nature. To read the original column, [subscribe](#) to the magazine. --Ed.

Bruce's dog intruded on the Easter sunrise service. It had caught a bunny, of all things, and choked while attempting to eat it. This little reminder of nature red in tooth and claw marred the morning's tranquility. The God emptying the borrowed grave in order to bring life and immortality to light seemed complicit in the routine reality of a dog-eat-bunny creation.

Of course we were in the Real World then, outside the confines of church walls. Nature, which up to that point had been seeming wondrously attuned to the miraculous—fleeing shadows, a growing chorus of birdsong, each bead of damp a prism for the dawning sun—now seemed violent, appetitive and prone to black humor.

We are not yet at that place where the lion and lamb rest together peacefully and the adder disdains to bite the infant's exploring hand. There is a deeper suffusion of God's nature in creation coming, at God's initiative, by and by. For now we are still post-Eden, with all the other creatures innocent of moral qualities, and ourselves distinguished by having, both to our loss and our gain, eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The dog, by long association with our species, looked ashamed once it had been

chastised. It was not, however, seeing things our way. Food in the wild was simply food; the necessity for hunting as opposed to showing up at the food dish was no great shift in perspective. Its experience was that meat is desirable and then that choking is uncomfortable.

It was also uncomfortable to have displeased its master, but that doesn't mean it was guilty. Guilt exists in a moral universe, and the way Genesis sees it, we have moral obligations in our relations to other creatures but they have no moral natures in themselves. Their unreflective participation in the food chain is part of their innocence.

That's not the innocence Easter was celebrating. We were there to share a dawning day marking both resurrection and rebirth. The old had passed away, behold, the new had come! God through Christ had reconciled the world to himself.

We looked away from the dog's botched breakfast. We weren't prepared to see how a realm of routine predation, of the innocent caught in the jaws of fate, was the world redeemed by Jesus. It is though. Our own path is not always standing amid friends at a hopeful sunrise. We live in a world inured to grosser brutalities than the natural world knows.

Jesus' own experience of suspicion, opposition, betrayal, injustice, torture and death finds its end in Easter; but that world is not at an end. Our advantage is that we've seen the final act, the empty tomb and the living Christ, not defeated. That's our hope in an environment which can be beautiful or bleak, meaningful or absurd.

The benefit of a beloved pet's exposing the world's violence and insecurity is that it keeps our religion fit for the real world. Otherwise we might imagine, like Jesus' contemporaries who didn't like him consorting with sinners, that it should be possible to be God's person by refusing to be part of the world into which we are born.

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