

Waiting for Easter

by Dwayne Bagley - District Superintendent, Greater Southwest District

My vantage point as we near the end of this Lenten season is not a view from an Upper Room. Despite the lack of similar location, I feel an ability to relate to the disciples huddled there after the death of their friend and mentor Jesus. Just as each one of the twelve was harboring some unmet expectation when Jesus set his face like flint toward Jerusalem and announced his longing to celebrate the Passover with them, I had much different expectations as the pages of the calendar turned and we neared the beginning of Lent.

I was going to do Lent “right” this year. It was a desire I felt but couldn’t really define. Something on the order of wanting to become more grounded so that I could reclaim a place to stand when reaching out. Reading has helped me in the past and this year I had determined that I would spend some time in the company of the twelve individuals who were gathered in Jesus’ inner circle. Clicking links on Amazon.com led me to a couple of titles that promised to unpack the lives of the Apostles and reveal what happened to them after Resurrection affirmed that the hope they put in Jesus was not, after all was said and done, misplaced. I’m sure those books would have provided accounts of Peter, James, John and all the rest which would have prompted me to consider what it means to be a follower of Christ. I remain certain each time I see their titles peeking out from the pile of untouched volumes stacked next to the brown Lay-Z-Boy chair in our living room.

In spite of my attention to distractions and general lack of Lenten discipline, I’ve been graced with a rare gift this year. It’s one that I didn’t know that I wanted. I remain unsure what to do with it. This year I’ve been granted rare insight into what it must have been like to actually be one of the twelve, and it came to me without reading a word. I’ve often tried to put myself in their place as a way of explaining their actions, reactions and inactions in response to the life, death and resurrection of our Lord. Up ’til now my efforts have always fallen short. After all, reading about their context doesn’t necessarily place you within that context. And thinking about their circumstances doesn’t bring you to the point where you feel the weight of them bearing down. Now, without reading or thinking at all, I know what it feels like to be one of the twelve huddled in the darkness of Good Friday. This year I know what it feels like to wait for what’s next.

Just as wondering what’s next fills my wandering mind, it must have haunted the hearts of the disciples. There was no way for them to know what would unfold. All the indications they had suggested that it was likely to be nothing good. And even though some of their darker thoughts may have been countered by half-remembered promises, a cloud of unknowing likely overshadowed any hope they lifted up.

I’ve felt shadows lengthen in similar ways during the last handful of days. The evening news recites a litany of losses that leads me to wonder what I will not say out loud. When will this present darkness break through my circle of acquaintances and touch the lives of those I love? There are warnings about worst weeks ahead and worse to come - none of which I am sure are to be believed. I know what I want to believe, however. I want to believe that I will see the goodness of the Lord in the Land of the Living and in the Valley of the Shadow. I want to believe that the words of the songwriter are true and to affirm even in my unknowing that: “to be absent from this body is to be present with the Lord. And from what I know of Him that must be very good.”

I want to believe that, when all of this is said and done, God will have the last word and that word will be one of Hope. Hope triumphant. Hope unbroken and unbowed. Hope that comes when and where we least expect it, but just exactly when and where we need it most. Hope that doesn’t disappoint us, but which replaces all our expectations with joy. In short, I want Easter to come. I want the Easter that comes for all God’s children who have been left waiting for what’s next. I pray that you will join me in waiting for it with patience and anticipation.