



Looking for Hope Among the Dead

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Side-by-side, two executions are relived this week in agonizing detail: the death of one fully human and fully God, perfect; the other fully human, a man who loved God, imperfect. We hear again the testimony of witnesses before a tribunal intended to ensure justice, describing torture and suffocation: one by hanging on a cross; one by the force of a knee across his neck. Their lives were taken violently, with force and taunting. For both, their execution came under the sanction of the state. In these two executions, we hear the cry of a people oppressed and the call for justice. And now, by the dint of the court's trial docket, we relive during the same week two executions that have been recorded in perpetuity: one in the Gospels and one on video.

We are accustomed to finding hope after the death of one of them. The empty tomb, the discarded burial cloths, the angel's message, the women's report: all reveal Jesus' glorious resurrection. Death has been cast out; its sting removed.

How are we supposed to find hope after the death of George Floyd? It feels that death has regained its piercing sting. The brutality of a nation and its systemic racism is revealed, not the glory of a resurrection. Where is hope in this?

Though we might be weary and cynical, we claim again the source of hope that has never failed us. Through the death of One hanging on the cross, hope persists in the midst of the death of another laying on a Minneapolis street. Jesus' saving death and resurrection, which we will celebrate this Easter Sunday, is relived each year out of necessity, not out of tradition. Death and grief remain part of us, but we cling to the promise of grace that restores us to life with God.

This grace covers an imperfect Black man who loved God and who died needlessly while bystanders pleaded for his life.

Just as Jesus welcomed into the Kingdom the thief hanging at his side, Jesus' grace extends to us all. Grace was as available to the soldiers who tortured him, as it was to his mother mourning at the foot of the cross. Grace covers the police officer who knelt on Mr. Floyd's neck until he died. It covers you. It covers me.

Grace is not cheap however. As a resurrection people, we are called to acknowledge our failings and repair the wounds we've caused. Some of that is individual work for each of us. It is also the collective work of a nation. We are reminded in Matthew 25 that Jesus will judge us on how we care for those arrested, tried, incarcerated, and released. With courage that comes through the resurrection, we are challenged to support organizations like the Joshua Glover Justice Fund to prevent life-damaging pretrial incarceration. We advocate for criminal system reform and against unjust parole and probation revocation. We mend; we repair.

We do not seek our hope among the dead, but among the living. Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed! Restored, forgiven, and called, we may now work with purpose and hope for a more just world. Have a blessed Easter!