

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the living Jesus Christ, amen.

In a scene that has become all too common these days, a police officer is gunned down in the streets of one of our cities. This used to be shocking and it still is, but the more it happens the more our senses become dulled. A couple of weeks ago I saw on TV the wake and funeral of a fallen police officer from New York. (SLIDE) The streets were lined with thousands of police officers and fire fighters from all over the country who had come to pay respects to their fallen comrade. It was quite a sight to behold. I heard the comments from one media analyst who simply said about the tragic loss of life, “We live in a fallen world.”

I have no idea about the religious or spiritual life of that media analyst, but that kind of language is usually religious in nature. I’ve said it many times myself because the truth is we do live in a world that isn’t all rainbows and unicorns.

(SLIDE) We live in a world where both the good and the bad happen, sometimes at the same time. To illustrate what I mean, imagine a blank sheet of paper. Now, in your mind draw a line down the middle. At the top of the left side write Good and on the top of the right side write the word bad. (SLIDE) Now try to list all the good things in your life under the Good heading. These might be things like your wedding day, the birth of your children, a promotion at work, or that new car you’ve been wanting. Now, the Bad side of the page we’re going to put all the

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negative things that happen in our lives. You might list things like getting laid off from your job, chronic pain or illness, property damage from the recent storms, or even a divorce. You might list bigger issues in society or culture as well. Things like crime, drug abuse, human trafficking, and terrorism. Now, suppose you could wipe away all those things on the bad side of the page. What would you call the world then? Utopia? Paradise? Heaven? ... What if you erased all the good things instead? What would you call the world then? A Nightmare? Hell? Life as we know it isn't all good or all bad. We live in a world of both and... This is what we call the real world. Perhaps we call it the "fallen world." Back to our media analyst. He's saying in the world we actually live -- not the world we'd like to live in -- the BAD side sometimes intrudes into the GOOD side, and that's what happened that fateful day when this police officer was shot to death.

Now let's go back to that two-column list once more. In which column would you put death? Certainly, our media analyst was thinking of the death of this police officer in the BAD column, and no doubt most of us would put it there too. On this side of the resurrection and on this last Sunday of the Easter Season, perhaps we can rethink our choice. (SLIDE)

In writing to the Christians in Corinth, Paul talks about the resurrection of the dead, apparently in response to some who were saying there is no such thing. He argues there most certainly is such a thing as the resurrection of the dead, and

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for proof, he points to the resurrection of Jesus. Listen to Paul's argument from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15 again, but this time from The Message, which is a biblical paraphrase by Eugene Peterson: (SLIDE) If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. But the truth is that Christ has been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries. There is a nice symmetry in this: Death initially came by a man, and resurrection from death came by a man. Everybody dies in Adam; everybody comes alive in Christ. But we have to wait our turn: Christ is first, then those with him at his Coming, the grand consummation when, after crushing the opposition, he hands over his kingdom to God the Father. He won't let up until the last enemy is down -- and the very last enemy is death!

When Paul talks about those who trust Christ eventually leaving cemeteries I'm reminded of those words from Revelation about death being no more. I read those comforting words at the graveside when I officiate at a funeral. When I read about a time when suffering and pain and even death will be no more I'm at a cemetery surrounded by people who have just lost someone they love and the sting of death is all around us. When they are at their lowest point in their lives, the loved ones of the dearly departed get to hear these words of comfort and of promise, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear

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from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” ... “The first things have passed away.” Another way to say it is: “The fallen world has passed away.”

When we live in a fallen world, sometimes it’s really hard to determine whether something belongs on the good or the bad side of our ledger. (SLIDE) So what can we do, or what attitudes can we embrace, to follow Christ in a fallen world? First off, because we follow a risen Jesus Christ we know that sometimes when things we call bad happen, Christ, operating through the Holy Spirit and other humans, turns that bad thing into something wonderfully good and beautiful. We’ve all seen it. Second, because we follow a risen Jesus Christ, we know that today isn’t the end of our story. Today might be the end of a chapter, but our story is still being written, so let’s not close the book just yet... When we follow the risen Jesus Christ we at least try to make choices in our lives that would be choices Jesus himself would have made. When we do, we tend to diminish some of the negative things and accentuate the positive. In some ways this tips the balance on our good and bad ledger toward the good. Finally, when we follow the risen Jesus Christ we don’t allow the fallen world to define who we are. We don’t despair or grieve as those who have no hope, because we know our redeemer lives and because Jesus lives, we will live also.

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When we gather on Sunday mornings, it's not to remember the death of a truly amazing human being at the hands of the Romans. (SLIDE) If that's all there is to our faith, then we should be pitied. Instead, we gather to proclaim that Jesus has indeed defeated death, that Christ is the Lord of our lives, and Jesus is Lord also of our future destinies. (SLIDE) We live in a fallen world, but we follow a risen Savior who has come to release our world from bondage to death and to put the shadows that are on our lives -- all that terrible BAD column stuff -- into a context of hope, until the day when the kingdom of God comes in its fullness, and BAD stuff is no more!

At funerals I usually add that until that day God gives us one another to dry our tears. But on this day I proclaim to you that God gives us mothers to dry our tears. (SLIDE) May this Mother's Day bring you nothing but good things. May you find no need for tears, or sorrow, or grief. (SLIDE) May your day be filled with all the goodness our Amazing and Awesome God can provide. Now, as a reminder of how amazing our God truly is, PJ has made pin or buttons for each Mom or female mentor here this morning. Like most Christians most of you come early to claim your seats near the back of the Sanctuary. So, as a reward to those of you who either got here late and had to sit down front or for those who are brave enough to sit down front, PJ will hand out these beautiful pins starting with the front pews. Happy Mother's Day! Amen.