

Lines for Easter: The Christian news

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [March 25, 2008](#) issue

A good friend and a favorite teacher in the church I served in Ohio was Walter Bouman, professor of theology at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus. We made him an honorary Presbyterian. About the only thing we ever seriously disagreed about was his passionate preference for the St. Louis Cardinals.

Not long after he retired Walt was diagnosed with inoperable cancer. He continued to teach and preach. When a *Columbus Dispatch* reporter asked him how he remained so buoyant, he replied: “My greatest source of encouragement is the Christian story of God into which I was baptized in July of 1929. The Christian news is that Jesus of Nazareth has been raised from death, that death no longer has dominion over him.”

The preacher’s task on Easter is to talk about something that doesn’t submit to reasonable discourse—the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Every preacher in the land knows that he or she is not up to this task. Every preacher is grateful for the other ways the resurrection is celebrated: by way of the hymns, the music of the organ and brass and the flowers.

When on occasion I whine a little bit about the daunting task of creatively conveying the message of the day, my closest adviser tells me what she also tells me at Christmas: “Keep it simple. Nothing fancy. What we want is to sing the hymns and hear the story.”

If human reason is the sole arbiter of truth, the very idea of resurrection is preposterous. But if there is truth not limited by human understanding, then we live in a new situation: “a new heaven and a new earth,” as the book of Revelation says. Let us not minimize or trivialize the resurrection by trying to explain it.

In his poem “Seven Stanzas at Easter,” John Updike urges us not to make resurrection a metaphor, “sidestepping transcendence,” but to “walk through the door.”

Jesus’ disciples walked through the door into a new world suddenly full of hope and possibility. Frightened, discouraged, grieving men and women somehow were transformed into brave, hopeful, loving bearers of good news. As Walter Bouman told the reporter: “The Christian news is that Jesus of Nazareth has been raised from death, that death no longer has dominion over him. I have bet my living and now I am able to bet my dying that Jesus will have the last word.”