

Sunrise: Easter laughter

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [April 4, 2006](#) issue

In the days before Easter, preachers find themselves ricocheting back and forth between anticipation of full-to-overflowing sanctuaries and anxiety about being up to the task. In the case of the people who make it to church only on Easter, the preacher has only one shot; we want to make it count.

The challenge is that we live in a Good Friday world. Theologian Jürgen Moltmann, who was conscripted at age 17 into the German army and witnessed the firebombing of his hometown of Hamburg, in which 40,000 civilians were killed, wrote that “Good Friday is the center of the world.” But he also wrote that “Easter morning is the Sunrise of the coming of God and the morning of new life and the beginning of the future of the world. The laughter of the universe is God’s delight. It is the universal Easter laughter in heaven and earth.”

Easter laughter? The story begins with weeping, grief, despair. Most of Jesus’ friends abandoned him after his arrest and watched in horror as he was summarily executed for sedition. They had actually begun to believe him when he said that love is better than hate, that forgiveness is better than revenge. They had begun to trust him when he said that the greatest good is love for God and neighbor and that the way to gain your own best life is to give it away. All of that died when his life ebbed away.

No wonder they were so incredulous when women returned from his tomb, reporting that it was empty. No wonder preachers stammer and stutter about the resurrection. For if it is true, then Good Friday is not the center of things. Easter is. And suddenly everything is new and different and possible.

Anne Lamott writes: “I don’t have the right personality for Good Friday, for the crucifixion. . . . I’d like to skip ahead to the resurrection vision of one of the kids in our Sunday School who drew a picture of the Easter Bunny outside an open tomb: everlasting life and a basket full of chocolates. . . .

“I hate it that you can’t prove the beliefs of my faith. . . . Darkness is our context, Easter’s context: without it you couldn’t see the light. Hope is . . . about choosing to believe this one thing, that love is bigger than any grim, bleak [stuff] anyone can throw at us.”

We crowd into churches to be part of worship because this truth is so big that not one of us is up to understanding it by ourselves; we celebrate with hymns because we can sing more than we can say, and with flowers, eloquent bearers of creation’s beauty. We gather to celebrate the goodness of life—of our lives and God’s gracious, unending presence with us.

When you sing, “Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!” you can hear, if you listen closely enough, Easter laughter.