

The end is life: "Love is the victor"

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [April 21, 2009](#) issue

Every year we preachers eagerly look for help with the daunting challenge of preparing an Easter sermon. Never are we as acutely aware of our own limitations, intellectual and spiritual, as when we try to find words to express the reality that a dead man didn't remain dead.

A book I often pull from the shelf is Frederick Buechner's *The Magnificent Defeat*, a collection of his early sermons that includes an Easter one titled "The End Is Life." In it Buechner describes the men who came to Pontius Pilate on Saturday, the day after Jesus was crucified, asking Pilate to provide guards for the tomb to make certain no one steals the body. They are the same religious and political leaders who convinced Pilate that it was in his best interests to do away with Jesus. Now they're back asking Pilate to secure the tomb. There is impatience and irritation in Pilate's response: "You go, make it as secure as you can."

Buechner describes that moment: "The venerable old men turning toward each other now, their faded old eyes wide with bewilderment, their mouths hanging loose—the kind of dazed, tremulous fear of old men suddenly called upon to do a young man's job. You are not sure whether to laugh or cry. 'As secure as you can.' . . . But how secure is that? Their lips move, but no sound comes. God knows they have good reason to be afraid."

What they are really afraid of, Buechner says, is that what Jesus promised would happen—that somehow on the third day he'd stand up and walk out of that tomb. Although the text doesn't say so, maybe their real fear—those old men who thought they knew everything there was to know about death—was that death had been overcome, that death itself was dead.

We are invested in the power of death. We are convinced that the way to combat death is with more death. Most of us seem certain that the appropriate response to an act of murder is to kill the murderer, even though it costs an enormous amount of money to get the job done, and there are no statistical data to suggest that it prevents other murders. We continue to execute people because we are invested in

the power of death.

People who know that resurrection happened, or who choose to trust in resurrection, live in a wholly new world where death has no more power—no more sting, as St. Paul put it. Buechner ends his sermon this way: “The proclamation of Easter Day is that all is well. . . . Love is the victor. Death is not the end. The end is life. His life and our lives through him, in him. Existence has greater depths of beauty, mystery, and benediction than the wildest visionary has ever dared to dream. Christ our Lord has risen.”