

Craving hope (Isaiah 65:17-25; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26)

We live between variants; we also live between Advents.

by [Katherine Willis Pershey](#)

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For two years now, we've been celebrating Easter in the midst of a global pandemic.

We still have the pandemic; a friend proclaims we should “live it up between variants.” But now we also have a deeply distressing war in Ukraine. As I write this, it seems possible that by Holy Week, the war could be over or it could have erupted into World War III.

Obviously, no matter the contours of current affairs, Easter is Easter. Christians will gather to hear once more the story of the women arriving at the tomb when it is still dark only to discover it has been emptied of the dead body it was supposed to contain. We will greet one another with a cheerful, “Christ is Risen!” even if our responsive “indeed!” is secretly irresolute. It is hard to believe that anything has changed—let alone that everything has changed—when we still live in a world beset by so many terrible things.

Most of the time I side with the preachers who argue that it's best to just tell the gospel story and get out of the way, especially on a day like Easter. This year, I'm not so sure. This year I'm craving the ancient prophetic wisdom of Isaiah. More than ever, I want to hear God go on about creating new heavens and a new earth. More than ever, I want joy restored in Jerusalem, and in all the other cities shattered by strife and conflict. More than ever, I want a promise that all people will be free to

flourish—to build and grow and give birth.

I want this more than ever because of the horrifying news from Ukraine. The last enemy to be destroyed is death, and death has not been sufficiently destroyed yet.

We live between variants; we also live between Advents. We are in some midpoint between the first and second coming of Christ, caught in an indeterminate median between Christ's life, death, and resurrection and the end, when he is scheduled to make everything right. Maybe this year we need to lean into that hope.

Paul writes, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." If we are only looking backward to the first Easter morning—sleepily retelling the resurrection story as if it is a half-truth with no actual bearing on the whole of our lives, on the world, on the cosmos itself—then we are to be pitied. Pitied *indeed*.