

April 4, 2021
Easter Day, Year B
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Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
John 20:1-18

The New York Times ran an article yesterday titled “We Have All Hit a Wall.” The subtitle was this: “Here’s How We’re Confronting Late-Stage Pandemic Burnout, with Everything from Edibles to Exodus.”¹ A related article was titled “Here’s What Readers Told Us About Feeling Burned Out.” The opening of that piece goes like this:

At this point in the pandemic, it feels that we have, all, collectively, hit a wall. Last week, *The New York Times* asked readers to tell us about work burnout they’re experiencing—nearly 700 people responded in two days. The responses were funny, vulnerable and indicative of a universal sense of: “We’ve had enough.” The collective picture they painted was of a work force struggling to do tasks that were once easy, people who know they are lucky to have a job but dream of quitting, and who would do anything to never have a Zoom meeting again.²

The article includes some of the reader responses. Here are some of my favorites:

- “I used to be able to send perfect emails in a minute or less. Now it takes me days just to get the motivation to think about a response.”
- “I can’t focus at all ... We’ve barely left the flat in over a year now. I’m lucky to have a job, but I fantasize about quitting all the time.”
- “I binged *Schitt’s Creek* 5 times in a row to avoid dealing with reality.”
- “I focus on my family, on keeping them happy and healthy. I also eat jelly beans.”³

For over a year and counting, our days have run one into the next, for months on end, with little variation. There have been a lot of references to the movie *Groundhog Day*. Those of us who try to order our lives around the liturgical calendar have described this as feeling stuck for over a year in Lent. It may *still* feel like Lent, but somehow, here we are, at our *second* pandemic Easter Sunday.

What, it’s Easter? Getting our heads around the first pandemic Easter was tough. Getting our heads around this second one feels even tougher. See, as evidence, those comments in the *Times*. Maybe the reason is this: last year we were ignorant of what was coming, and this year we know better.

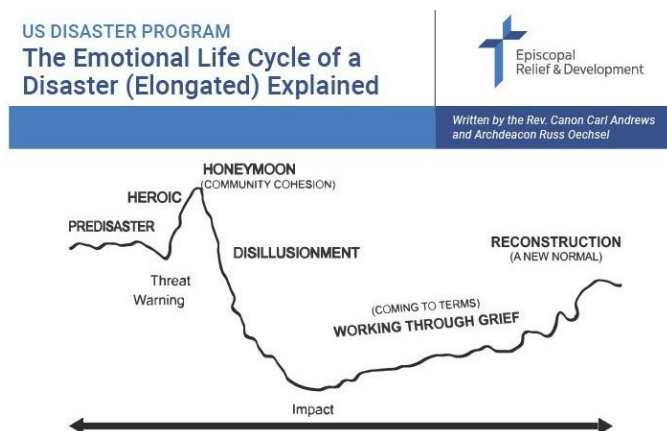
Maybe things are looking up. What occurred to me to use here is the phrase “cautiously optimistic.” Before I tossed it off, I decided to Google its definition. In *Urban Dictionary*, the number two definition of *cautiously optimistic* is this: “A euphemistic (yet silly) way of saying ‘worried.’”⁴ Okay, yeah, hard to admit, but I guess that’s about right.

In our collective experience with COVID-19, we started out as starry-eyed novices, but now we are seasoned veterans. In this as in so much of life, the wisdom of longevity is both a blessing and a curse. We probably wouldn't *trade* it, but we don't always *like* it. Yes, we are grateful to begin resuming activities we used to enjoy. But we're still grieving, we're still anxious, and we still don't know what the "new normal" will bring.

Today we heard John's story of the first Easter Sunday morning. Jesus, showing off his fully resurrected body, pops in for a chat with Mary Magdalene. John's gospel continues on with the story of the first Easter evening, in which Jesus swings around to check in on all the disciples—well, all except our patron, Thomas.

These are great stories, but this year I found myself wondering less about the *first* Easter Sunday and more about the *second* Easter Sunday. The first Easter was tough, but I bet the second one was tougher. After the emotional dip of the crucifixion, seeing Jesus would have brought an emotional high. But that emotional high couldn't have lasted; you just know it would have been followed by an emotional crash. Once Jesus left for good, the disciples had to grieve, they had to plan, they had to work. A year later, they would still have been figuring it out. As far as we know, Jesus did not drop by for a mood boost.

I want to share a diagram with you. It's from Episcopal Relief & Development. ERD is the international relief and development agency of the Episcopal Church. Among its work is natural disaster response around the globe. The diagram is "The Emotional Life Cycle of a Disaster."⁵



Here you can see the dip from the disaster itself and the "heroic" response. That's followed by a brief "honeymoon" high. That's followed by a precipitous "disillusionment" crash. And that's followed by the lengthy, up-and-down process of "working through grief" and the "reconstruction" of a new normal. Some folks in the church have been sharing this for months as a way to help anticipate and explain the COVID-19 emotional life cycle. COVID-19 might not exactly reflect the diagram, but you get the idea.

Applying this concept to the first disciples, you have to figure that they spent the entire rest of their lives in reconstruction mode. They were reconstructing while developing a whole new style of architecture. We know they did it; of that, we are part of the evidence. As they did it, every year, no matter how bumpy the road, whether they felt like it or not, Easter rolled around. Jesus didn't flaunt his resurrected body, but he showed up in other ways. He showed up because they showed up; he showed up through them.

Those of us who lead generally comfortable lives come to expect that our lives will always be comfortable. At least, that's what we allow ourselves on the surface. Deep down, we know it's not true. At the very least, we know that, in the end, we're going to die. Deep down, we know that, any day, the tragedy could strike that will change our lives forever. We may say, "It doesn't feel like Easter," or, "I don't feel like Easter"—but Easter comes anyway, whether we expect it or feel it or like it or want it or notice it. It comes anyway, because it doesn't depend on us. It depends on God, and God always shows up.

God resurrects life even if it appears to us to be most decidedly dead. Jesus exits the tomb even while everyone else is still mired in Good Friday. The Holy Spirit drops in even when we think we aren't prepared for her.

We begin our celebration of Easter at the Vigil, by re-telling the stories of God's saving action throughout the ages. All those stories make up one long saga about God's relationship with creation. Christians recognize the story of Easter as the climax of that saga, but it's not the *end* of it. Many more stories followed, and many more stories are yet to come. God's relationship with you is one of those stories.

Maybe Easter doesn't feel like a party this year. But maybe it feels a little like relief. The kind of relief you get when you've been having a tough time, and you sit down for a cup of coffee with an old friend. You know you're just taking a break, and more tough times are yet to come. But it *sure feels good*. That's not denial. In fact, the honesty of it can be the most genuine thing we can do. Sometimes sustenance is offered to us with no strings attached. It's okay to accept it.

I hope God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit or the Universe or your Higher Power shows up for you some time this Easter season. Use for it the pronouns of your choice; call them what you want; envision them as you will. I can just imagine it. It's a beautiful spring day, 68 degrees, slightly breezy, the sky a deep blue and sunny with just a few puffy white clouds. Everything is in bloom. There is no such thing as allergies. They show up; they're carrying your favorite beverage—coffee or tea or something a little stronger. "Hey, there," they say, "I've missed you." And you reply, "I've missed you, too. Gosh, I'm glad you're here. Can you sit for a while?"

Of course they can sit, for a good, long while. I hope you can, too.

Notes

¹ Sarah Lyall, “Here’s How We’re Confronting Late-Stage Pandemic Burnout, with Everything from Edibles to Exodus,” *The New York Times*, March 3, 2021, available online at

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/03/business/pandemic-burnout-productivity.html> (accessed March 4, 2021).

² Sophia June, “Here’s What Readers Told Us About Feeling Burned Out,” *The New York Times*, March 3, 2021, available online at

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/03/business/readers-pandemic-burnout.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage> (accessed March 4, 2021).

³ Ibid.

⁴ “cautiously optimistic,” *Urban Dictionary*, available online at

<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Cautiously%20Optimistic> (accessed March 4, 2021).

⁵ Episcopal Relief & Development, available at <https://www.episcopalrelief.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/elongated-emotional-life-cycle-of-a-disaster-explained.pdf> (accessed March 4, 2021).