



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Easter Sunday

April 16, 2017

The Rev. Sharon K. Gracen

What a beautiful morning, in so many ways. After winter, even a mild one we are always in need of spring. We crave the warmth and the blooming things. We have a deep seeded need for renewal. We need the reminder that winter does not last. We need the reminder that we are not left in Lent and the despair of Good Friday. Yes, the world needs Easter.

The world needs Easter. It did so before and during Jesus' time, as evidenced by the ecstatic following he had. People followed him for a reason, not just because he was a compelling, miracle working, powerful presence. They followed him because he gave them the promise that the hardness of their lives wasn't what God wanted for them. God's plan looks very different from a world of war and occupation, injustice and despair. The powers of Jesus' time said, "keep preaching that and we will shut you up and shut you down. Their strategy was execution and crucifixion. In response to that, God said, "Easter!"

I recently became aware of some evidence in an unlikely place of a cry for Easter today. This evidence is found in the world of literature and some interesting entries on best-seller lists. Books like George Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm*, Aldus Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* have all experienced a surge in popularity in libraries and at the cash register. All of these belong to the genre known as *dystopian fiction*. In the 16th century, Sir Thomas More's wrote a book called *Utopia*. It described an ideal society. People lived a simple life of balance, with a disdain for wealth and inequality, with freedom and choice. Dystopian novels describe cultures that look very different, filled with mass poverty, fear and suspicion, maybe a police state, and little if any choice. Sometimes there is some fundamental human characteristic that has been outlawed or corrupted.

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The current surge of dystopian popularity has some roots in our political climate. However, what I'm taken with is the great audience for the young adult dystopian literature which has been around for more than the last couple of years. *The Hunger Games* was written in 2008. It gave us a frightening panorama of a culture in which inequality, hunger, and reality TV combine into one nasty dystopia. This genre of literature provides a "what if" commentary on life as we know it. What if we don't do something about poverty and inequality? What if someone could listen to everything we say and do? What if reality TV got real?

Most of these books look to some sort of an Easter – some statement that the conditions in which people live are not ok and that there is another way. There is always a hero, male or female, who in some way rebels against the way things are and challenges the system. Think Neo in *The Matrix*. Our young people really resonate with these stories and who could blame them. Sadly, most of them don't realize that it is also our sacred story. Life in 1st century Palestine was dystopian. The Roman army was a constant, brutal presence. In the year 36, a few years after that first Easter, Pontius Pilate was recalled to Rome to stand trial for his excessively brutality against the people of Israel. Jesus' crucifixion had merely been one of thousands. There was hunger, poverty, an unfair justice system. And the piece that got a lot of Jesus' attention was the added burden laid on the people by the very thing that should have made their lives better, their faith. Perhaps it wasn't as fantastical as *Hunger Games* but when Jesus was crucified, died and buried, the people needed Easter to know that the vision that he had given them wasn't just a dream. It is God's dream.

At its core, dystopian fiction examines the questions, what does it mean to be human? And what gives meaning to life? Jesus' story, especially his resurrection, answers those questions this way; to be fully human is to be aware that we are part of the divine life; it is to become like Jesus. That knowledge is what gives us meaning and purpose. When we know that we are beloved, then we can love others with freedom and courage.

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What do our young people see today that draws them to *Hunger Games* and other dystopian novels? Well, they see a level of indifference to things like hunger and damage done to our environment. They see that corporate profits will always come before kindness and that the spectacular wealth of the few is linked to the struggle of the many. They see a world that needs Easter. One reason that people are flocking to dystopian novels is that when you read them you at least get the sense that things could be worse. This literature provides a caution for all of us of what might come. Easter provides a promise of what can be.

Easter is the vision of a better world, a world in which power is not used to enslave but to lift up and to strengthen. Easter is a promise of peace and joy, of fellowship and hope. Easter is the confidence that God's answer will always lead us to an empty tomb, to a triumph over the forces of darkness and death, to the vanquishing of fear and alienation. Easter tells us that hope is not fiction. The world needs Easter and thanks be to God, He is risen! Alleluia!

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