



April 2023

Dear CWR/PTM Friend and Partner,

Christmas, at least in its popular celebrations, centers on the birth of a baby. Who doesn't love and adore babies? What's not to like about feasting, music, decorations and presents? But Easter? In large part Easter is celebrated with eggs, chocolates, bunnies, flowers and Easter bonnets because that's the way the secular world has dolled it up.

But by contrast with the warm, fuzzy and heartwarming story of Christmas, the deeper meaning behind Easter involves the haunting specter of a cross, with agonizing suffering, eventually death... and then there's that dead body in a tomb. Birth and death—we prefer new life over the end of life, do we not? *Wouldn't you rather go to a birthday party than a cemetery?*

Christmas has a huge cast of biblical characters including Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the wise men, the shepherds, Herod, the animals and let's not forget the Angel Gabriel and the heavenly choir singing "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14). It's an epic stage play, a spellbinding production with a huge cast and inspiring music... *Handel's Messiah* and the *Hallelujah Chorus*—sending hair-raising chills down one's spine.

Then there's Easter. Sure, there's people on the stage when it all begins, but by the end, the stage is bare. Just an empty cross remains. The original audience to this drama were stunned by the decisive and overwhelming defeat their side suffered. They were convinced their "team" with Captain Jesus would win. But they lost and their leader was humiliated. Jesus who promised a kingdom is dead.

But the story of Easter is just this—it's not over until it's over!

We now know, from almost 2000 years of hindsight, that the empty and bare stage, with all of Jesus' friends and disciples running away from him, with the body of Jesus in a tomb... it was not all over. In the last act of the story victory over death and the grave proves far more decisive than the apparent defeat we had seen played out on earlier on the stage of Easter.

But, still, immediately after the resurrection, a sense of ignominious defeat continued to deflate the hopes and dreams of the disciples. There was no spontaneous party after the resurrection—no joy, no recognition of the victory that had been won. The empty tomb and the absence of the corpse did not induce joy and dancing.

When Jesus' body was discovered missing from *where it should have been*, the disciples did not immediately decorate the tomb nor were there majestic heavenly choirs singing breathtaking music. It was all so confusing... so upside down, so different than the way the disciples expected. Now they were experiencing fear—fear of the unknown—and they huddled together, in silence, behind locked doors, paralyzed by that fear (John 20:19).

Birth—we love births, don't we? The birth of Jesus is exciting and wonderful. A new, fresh little baby—a new life that will stretch way into the future. Deeper still, beyond the baubles, decorations and gifts of Christmas, we marvel and wonder at the love of God who, in the person of Jesus,

became human—the God-man, who came to be one of us and with us. Just like us. Right next door to us. The incarnation! Incredible!!

While we still love birthday parties—burials, cremations and cemetery visits are times of grief and loss. Someone being resurrected from the dead? That's a wonderful idea but it's never happened to anybody we know. Bodies in the cemetery usually stay where they are placed, as do the ashes (the remains) left after a cremation.

When we go deeper still, beyond the bunnies and chocolate eggs of Easter, and deeper still beyond what seemed to be the humiliation and defeat of the cross, we see that **eternal and forever victory was snatched out of the jaws of defeat**. We see, on deeper insight provided by the grace of God, that the Cross of Christ was not ignominious defeat. **The body of Jesus did not remain in the tomb!**

Mary Magdalene was the first, it seems, to arrive at the empty tomb. John says Mary saw that the stone that sealed the tomb had been removed so she ran to Peter and *the other disciple* reporting that *they* had taken the body of Jesus away (John 20:1-2, my emphasis). When Mary returned to the tomb she was crying because she still believed Jesus' body had been taken by someone. She saw two angels, and she told them exactly what she had told the disciples— *“they have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don't know where they have put him”* (John 20:11-13, my emphasis).

The story of Easter is all about the Cross and the empty tomb. **He rose from the dead, not to great fanfare and instant acclaim but to disbelief and fear.** And that's a keynote theme in Easter. Fear and disbelief. After Jesus rose from the dead the disciples went into hiding. They were afraid—afraid that the same thing that had happened to Jesus would happen to them. If “they” could kill Jesus, who walked on water, resurrected Lazarus, healed the sick, created food for thousands, surely, reasoned the disciples, “they” can kill us.

Fear mesmerized and traumatized them, just as it does us. Fear disabled them spiritually. Fear popped the bubble of their faith. Fear took all the wind out of their sails. Jesus' embarrassing and shameful (as it seemed to them at the time) death on his Cross was a bomb that blew up and obliterated their world into a gazillion little pieces of fear.

Fear is all about shame and guilt and failure. As much as the disciples wanted to believe Jesus when he told them during his ministry that he would rise from the dead and conquer death and the grave they were overcome by fear, which is, apart from the grace of God, to some degree the state in which all humans live.

That's the state of our world right now. Fear is the great tool of the state and of religion. The news media thrives when it stirs the pot of human emotions. Politicians gain power through skillful manipulation of the multitudes through fear and they remain in power in the same way. “They” seem to have great power over us. Religious authorities, another “they,” are filled with threats of eternal conscious torment in hell for those who do not follow “their” dictates. Our world is engulfed by a frenzy of fear, rather than the peace of God. Billions of people experience a state of continued agitation rather than rest in Christ.

But it's not over until it is over!

The disciples were behind those locked doors, in silence, fearful and grieving, when...

Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this, he showed them his hands

and side [which still bore the marks of the violence done to him on the Cross]. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he **breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit”** (John 20:19-22, my emphasis).

Fear, shame and embarrassment are fertile soil for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus greets the beleaguered, disheartened and defeated disciples with the word **Peace**. More than just a greeting, the risen Lord gives them his **Peace**... HIS **Peace**, not just any peace.

The **Peace** of God. The *Shalom* of God. He said it twice in this passage. He wasn't just greeting them with a word, more than that, he was giving them a divine gift, a blessing of God.

Shalom is one of the most beautiful words in any language—it means of course peace, but conveys tranquility, rest, assurance, wholeness, harmony and unity.

Then Jesus **breathed “on” them**—many scholars believe “on” is an unfortunate translation, preferring the term INTO as a more accurate description of what he did. Jesus breathed into the disciples, who felt they had received the kiss of death—he breathed into them the kiss of life. When God made man he *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*... (Genesis 2:7). This is spiritual CPR if you like—Jesus is **breathing new life into dead men (and women) walking!**

God is fully revealed in the Cross and the Resurrection. God is revealed, in Christ, as a saving, loving, merciful, forgiving, healing God—GOD IS THE GOD WHO COMES OUT OF HELL.

God is not where humans “put” him. God confounds human efforts to control him, even to kill and eradicate him. God comes back. God never leaves. We don't put God somewhere safe—he is alive, he is risen, and lives forever that we might live.

This Easter, receive these two gifts of God's grace, flowing to you from the full and complete and supreme love of God demonstrated to and for us on the Cross of our Lord.

1) Receive the Shalom of God. Rest, assurance, tranquility and unity, in and with Jesus.

2) Receive the Breath of God—new life, eternal life because of the life of our risen Lord.

He rose so that we can live free, forgiven and forever! **It's not over until God says it's over!!**

Happy Easter to you, my dear friends!

Your brother in Christ,



Greg Albrecht
President, Plain Truth Ministries

CWR/PTM Prayer List—April 2023

These requests for prayer represent just a few of the thousands we receive and pray for. We invite you to join us in praying for these and the others that space does not permit us to include here. Thanks for joining with us as a CWR/PTM Prayer Partner.

I have been suffering with neuropathy in my feet. Please pray for relief and for God's healing.—New Hampshire

Please pray for my daughter. She was told that she has a tumor in her head. She is waiting to find out if it's cancerous. Thank you for your prayers and concern.—Arizona

My wife just recently passed away. Please ask God to give me the strength and courage to go through my loss.—Ohio

I am studying with CWR/PTM learning about Christ alone. I'm sharing it online with others. I thank God and pray for many others to learn of his great love.—Puerto Rico

My tremors are getting worse. I would really appreciate your prayers for me.—Virginia

Please pray that God will draw me, my children, my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren to a closer walk with him, and that we will love him more and be a blessing to each other.—West Virginia

Many thanks for all the spiritual nourishment that comes my way from CWR/PTM. Much of my spiritual sustenance also comes from daily prayer and observation of God's beautiful creation. I pray for God to continue to bless everyone at PTM.—Ontario, Canada

Please pray for my grandson who has mental problems. Also, please pray for my husband, who is struggling with various health issues.—Massachusetts

I pray for the ministry of CWR/PTM every day. I am thankful to be a part of this great work. May God be with you and continue to bless each one of you.—Alabama

Please pray for my oldest brother, 70, who had surgery for the removal of an acute blockage in his colon.—Virginia

Thank you so much for your uplifting messages. I share them with friends. I pray for God's blessings for everyone at PTM. Thank you for reminding us how grateful we should be for the amazing grace of God's love for us.—Utah

Please pray for my two daughters to quit smoking. They're both having health issues. And please pray for me because I'm having heart problems.—West Virginia

Please pray for my sister who is having trouble with the port for her dialysis. It keeps getting infected and doesn't work correctly. She is struggling with congestive heart failure, as well. Thank you for your prayers!—North Dakota

Please pray for my niece who has checked into rehab for alcohol addiction.—Michigan

Please pray that I get an improved financial footing to be able to pay my bills and to also be able to give more to help spread the good news about Jesus and his love.—Maryland

Please pray for my son to be blessed in his new job and for my daughter who suffers from anxiety. Please also pray for my other daughter to lose weight which will improve her health.—Ohio

I pray that we all will let Jesus work with us so we can be more uplifting to others. Thank you!—Washington

Please pray for my niece who is suffering from severe migraine headaches. Thank you to everyone who is involved with CWR/PTM.—Virginia

Our Father in Heaven: We thank you for your grace, mercy and love. You love each of these individuals, and we thank you in advance for the answers you will provide for each request. With thanksgiving for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our suffering servant who heals us, in whose name we pray—Amen.