

Against Hopelessness

Sermon for Easter Sunday 2026

(Acts 10:34a, 37–43 / Col 3:1–4 / John 20:1–18)

Dear sisters and brothers, it is an old mechanism of our brain to process bad information more quickly and store it longer than good. From an evolutionary perspective, this trait gave human beings a great advantage: those who were warned in this way could better protect themselves from dangers — a survival mechanism that still works today. The downside, of course, is that it is difficult for us to escape such negative influence. Instead, our brain tends to keep pursuing it endlessly. This phenomenon is called “doomscrolling”: the compulsive reading from one alarming report to the next. What used to be limited to the immediate surroundings and thus directly relevant to one’s own life and survival has now taken on different dimensions. Social media now gives us access to news from even the most remote corners of the world — almost in real time. We are exposed to this abundance with hardly any filtering. Many people are overwhelmed by it.

In journalism, this is accompanied by the so-called “man-bites-dog” principle. This means that extremely unusual events receive more attention than everyday life. Whoever wants to appear on the front page of newspapers or broadcasts and achieve wide reach needs spectacular events, negative news, stirring scandals, and sensational headlines. That simply sells better; it keeps people talking and remembering. Populists and demagogues also rely on painting a bleak picture and stirring up fears.

But what does this do to us? In many, feelings of hopelessness arise; the willingness to help shape the present and the future may fade, and the ability to see a differentiated picture of the world can become clouded. For amid all that is threatening and worrying, the whole of reality is not being portrayed. Reality also includes the fact that, for example, life expectancy worldwide has increased; global health has improved massively; medical research is making progress in combating serious diseases; child mortality has declined significantly; and more and more people — especially girls — have access to education, electricity, and clean water. And there is also much good on a small scale: in our personal surroundings, in the cities and towns where we live, or within our churches. People commit themselves to and for one another and accomplish something together for the good of many. Yet because we pay more attention to unpleasant news than to encouraging news, we find it difficult to trust that the world and our lives can also change for the better.

It is therefore not surprising that the joyful message of Easter also unfolds its power only gradually and is understood in its full significance only slowly. At least this is how it is for the disciples — as we have just heard in the Gospel. They come to the empty tomb; the facts speak for themselves, but they cannot interpret or comprehend them. “For they did not yet understand the Scripture” (John 20:9), “that he must rise from the dead.” As is told about Mary Magdalene, the risen Lord meets them personally several times. Nevertheless, it is not easy for them to understand what has happened and what it will mean for their lives and for the fate of the world. Almost all the Easter Gospels testify to such reactions. That is why, I believe, they can help us today to deal with our own inner conflict. “Because they do not suppress fear,” as a theologian of our time (Thomas Söding) says, “they give courage. Because they do not conceal doubt, they strengthen faith. They create hope where

everything argues for abandoning it. They proclaim victory over death when it seems definitively to have won.”

This means: we may trust in the power of life and hope in the resurrection with Christ. Yet the world does not suddenly become completely different; injustice, wars, violence, and destruction do not simply disappear. Without ignoring the negative, however, a new perspective is given to us. “Seek what is above,” the Apostle Paul writes to the community in Colossae (3:1f). “Set your minds on things that are above, not on earthly things.” The horizon widens and offers us another view of events in our world and in our own lives.

Accepting this is not easy. According to neuroscientists, we cannot simply discard the mechanism of our brain that processes negative news more quickly and stores it longer. But we can change habits, break routines, consciously create times of rest, and shift our focus. From the post-Easter perspective, the Gospels repeatedly tell of small Easter stories: a man born blind can see again, the lame walk, the deaf hear, people are forgiven their guilt and given new participation in the life of the community. So let us also think of the small Easter events in our world — wherever there are refreshing and encouraging signs of life, however quiet they may be: the heartbeat of an unborn child in the womb; the awakening of spring after a long winter — how strongly we can feel it this year; the gift of reconciliation where there has long been conflict; the experience of helping hands when we cannot manage alone; the touching care for the lonely and sick; or the selfless commitment to others in times of great need.

Easter does not mean glossing everything over, painting everything rosy, or sentimentalizing it. But the feast of the Resurrection invites us to notice more attentively those moments that turn our gaze toward the positive sides of life — in these days and beyond. This naturally includes the boundless hope for the redemption and fulfillment of every person in God’s glory. It gives us the strength not to give up — even when everything fails and the goal seems lost — but to persevere and continue working for a better world. Put differently: those who have a “where to” and a “what for” can endure almost any “how.” Such profound confidence also shines in an entry in a condolence book after the murder of seven Trappist monks in Algeria, which read: “You can trample seven flowers, but you cannot prevent spring from blossoming again.” And the cabaret artist Hanns Dieter Hüsch (1925–2005) expressed his Easter faith in this way:

“I am joyful, redeemed, set free.
God took into his hands my time,
my feeling, thinking, hearing, speaking,
my triumph and my despair,
the misery and the tenderness.
What makes me so fearless
on many dark days?
A spirit comes into my mind,
wants to carry me through life.
What makes me so lighthearted,
and no gloom holds me?
Because my God teaches me to laugh,
yes, over all the world.”

Certainly, much in the world still appears incomprehensible to us. But with Easter we are promised that death still exists, yet it has only the penultimate word. The last word belongs to God — and that word is life. This should fill us with confidence and, despite all that burdens and paralyzes us, lead us to join in the Church's Easter acclamation: "The Lord is risen! He is truly risen!"