

Ash Wednesday

Restore my joy in your salvation. Ps. 51

This is one of those years when Easter comes early. It feels like we are moving very quickly from Advent to Christmas to Epiphany to Lent. Maybe everything happens more quickly these days—as we grow older, meet ever shorter deadlines and follow a 24-hour news cycle. Weren't we just singing hymns about the Three Kings coming from the Orient? How can we turn ourselves around this quickly from the joy of the birth of Christ to the somber time of Lent? Yet here we are, taking on the ashes that remind us that our worldly life is short and our life in God is forever.

It was just such a startling turnaround that brought the disciples from Jesus's baptism in the Jordan River, to the heady days of his ministry, when crowd control was one of their job descriptions. It carried them forward as they witnessed Jesus healing people who came to him, and they heard a new message of mercy from the lips of one whom they began to understand to be divine. From the triumphant entry into Jerusalem when their leader was hailed as the Messiah, they found themselves committed to Him and to one another. Then they were confronted by the horrifying experience of seeing their beloved Jesus tortured and executed. Deep in their fear, desolation and despair, they received the glorious, stupefying news that the tomb was empty and Christ had triumphed over death. It was more than they could comprehend. How then can we take it in?

Life changes very quickly. We who work in the delivery of health care witness the whip-saw changes that life delivers to everyone. We are present as babies are born and welcomed into the world by ecstatic parents and families. We are present in emergency departments where the suddenness of injury or illness tests one's emotions and rationality. We are present in hospice when the long, certain and painful goodbyes are

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taken. Along the whole range of human experience, in joy and suffering, we are there as witnesses and servants.

Lent slows us down and prepares us, individually and in community, for the great message of salvation through Christ's Resurrection. During the period of Lent, leading to Holy Week, and ultimately the glory of Easter, we practice together what it means to be Christians professing belief in the One Creator God. Through ritual, fasting, penance, prayer and reflection we enter the mystery of faith.

The music, by Margaret Rizza and Kevin Duncan, is from the album "Her Music for Piano," Kevin Mayhew Publishers.

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