

# THE INVITATION

New Testament scholar N. T. Wright pointed out in his book *Surprised by Hope* that we sometimes “keep Lent, Holy Week and Good Friday so thoroughly that we have hardly any energy left for Easter.” But he declares, “Easter should be the center. Take that away and there is, almost literally, nothing left.”<sup>1</sup>

I invite you to place Easter at the center of your Lenten journey. It’s the invitation to see the dark, deadly realities of our lives in light of the Resurrection. I invite you to watch for the way the Easter earthquake shifts the ground beneath some of our common assumptions and holds out before us a new way of living.

In the liturgical tradition, Lent involves forty days of spiritual discipline that lead to the cross. In this serious season, we face the dark realities of the sin in our lives and the suffering of the world. But the forty days do not include Sundays. We celebrate Sunday as the day of Resurrection—a weekly reminder that our world’s dark realities are the shadow side of the light that shines from an empty tomb. It’s the joyful declaration of a new day dawning for us and for our world.

Instead of giving up something for Lent, I invite you to take up a daily discipline of reflection on scripture and prayer. Like the liturgical calendar, we will begin each week with a longer reflection on the Resurrection while drawing on the suggested readings for the daily meditations. It’s also the invitation to share our individual discoveries with other disciples in a small group in the assurance that the risen Christ who appeared to the disciples gathered in the upper room will be present among us

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as well. You will find “A Guide for Small-Group Gatherings” on page 119.

I’ve included a “Hymn of the Week” that connects with the content of that week’s study. I encourage you to find a recording or YouTube video of the hymn and include it in your personal meditation or small-group gathering. Feel free to choose other songs that speak to you for use during this time as well.

One traditional Resurrection hymn calls us to “sing the resurrection song!” (UMH, no. 702). William Marcus James was in his late nineties when I met him. He was born in Mississippi in 1915 and grew up in the dark days of racial segregation. Ordained in The Methodist Church in 1938, he served most of his pastoral ministry in Harlem as a voice for racial justice and nonviolence in New York City and throughout his denomination. He continued to be full of life until he died at ninety-seven. His best-known hymn is a bold declaration of life in the power of the Resurrection.

Easter people, raise your voices,  
sounds of heaven in earth should ring.  
Christ has brought us heaven’s choices;  
heavenly music, let it ring.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Easter people, let us sing.

Fear of death can no more stop us  
from our pressing here below.  
For our Lord empowered us  
to triumph over every foe.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!

On to victory now we go.

Every day to us is Easter,  
with its resurrection song.

When in trouble move the faster  
to our God who rights the wrong.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

See the power of heavenly throngs. (UMH, no. 304)

—WILLIAM M. JAMES

Welcome to life in the aftermath of the Easter earthquake!