

## PERSEVERANCE

"Great sermon, Mark"

"I really enjoyed the service, Pastor."

Along with these kind comments offered to me following worship on Easter, I also heard "Now you can go home and rest!" One dear member simply said, "Phew!" and let out a loud sigh of relief on my behalf. Several thoughtful and supportive congregants were well aware of the extra time and energy required to pull together the services and sermons for Easter week.

Their kind words for my well-being were very much appreciated, but allow me to let you in on a little secret: while I was perhaps a bit sleep deprived throughout Easter week and while grateful for the chance to put my feet up Easter afternoon, I loved every minute of it! In the spirit of Baseball Hall of Famer Ernie Banks I was thinking, "Let's play two!"

I, like most of my clergy colleagues, share the "E" preference in the Myers-Briggs personality instrument. E is for extraversion. It doesn't mean we are extroverts in the more common sense, one who is the life of the party and always "up." It means we are most connected to people, places and events of the outer world. So when the pews are nearly filled, my batteries charge faster than an iPhone at 98%. I draw on energy from the people and having the pews filled on Easter morning overfills any energy deficit caused by the work demanded.

The tough Sunday, the tiring Sunday is the Sunday after Easter. And the Sunday after that. And the one following that. When the excitement of Resurrection Sunday gets eclipsed by the demands of youth sports. When the willingness and drive to get the family ready to show up for worship and be surrounded by the sights and fragrance of Easter morning is eroded by other commitments or the simple desire to stay home, to engage with a digital screen of preference. When the pews become distressingly empty. That's when I get tired.

William Willimon, writing about those times in the church's life when energy flags and it seems like all the new life of Easter and Pentecost really haven't changed anything, quotes a conversation from C.S. Lewis' The Screwtape Letters. In it, the "senior" devil, Screwtape, is writing to his younger satanic charge. He says of humans, "It is so hard for these creatures to persevere. The routine of adversity, the gradual decay of youthful hopes, . . . the drabness which we create in their lives, and inarticulate resentment with which we teach them to respond to it— all this provides admirable opportunities of wearing out a soul by attrition."

Much of life is like the Sunday after Easter, so let's decorate our days not just with pink tulips, but with perseverance.