

I've been intrigued by an ad that's been running for the past few weeks. The company doesn't matter. It's a place that sells everything. Clothes, food, jewelry, electronics, candy, toys – all in abundance. There's a sale for every season, and every holiday under heaven.

In this commercial, the stars are children. Lots of them. They are wearing bright new clothes, new shoes, new hats. They play in a yard. They eat chocolate candy. They jump into the pool in their new clothes and shoes and hats to pick up toys. I watched in horror as cowboy boots hit the water. But, then I remembered that they were probably faux leather and relaxed a little.

The one liner at the end of the ad – the one they want you to remember as you walk into the store – is “Easter like you mean it.”

Easter like you mean it. Egad. What's next?

Graduate like you mean it? Vacation like you mean it? Barbeque like you mean it?

I don't know which was worse. The fact that bunny rabbits played absolutely no part in this consumerist tragedy or one more perfectly good noun was verb-a-cized.

Let's face it, there is so much wrong with this ad from a Christian perspective. Jesus doesn't enter in at all. The only saving grace might be the kids all playing together. Except for the fact that they are all going to show up at dinner in wet clothes. I don't think grandma will be pleased.

However, I can't just use my own bias and trash this company for doing what most everything in society is doing....leaving Christianity – actually almost all spiritual endeavor – behind. The secular humanist looks at us and sees what looks like intelligent people believing in magic. They don't understand how we can accept non-scientific story as if it were fact. They see people who, on one hand, say that God is love and on the other hand, tell people they will be sent by that God to a very nasty place when they die.

They have a point. And, in that point lies our opportunity. They are watching us.

They are listening to us. How do we EASTER like we mean it?

I think the first step is understanding that Easter is the beginning of a way of life and not the end of a really long week. We hold the truth of Christ's resurrection sacred regardless of the facts surrounding the event. We hold this truth because it has been passed down to us, generation after generation. The story continues to be life-changing for those who take it into their hearts. Jesus broke the power of death. We may fear the events leading up to our eventual shedding of this mortal coil, but we don't need to fear death itself. Death is vanquished.

When the fear of death is no longer, we can truly live, and fully show forth God's love. As St. Irenaeus said, "The glory of God is a human fully alive." Being fully alive means acknowledging your fears, but going forward anyway. It is acknowledging your grief and continuing to do the laundry. It is acknowledging that Jesus may have been in the tomb three days, but your tomb time may last a little longer. It is knowing that eventually, the stone will be rolled away and you

will emerge a new person. It is understanding that because you can trust your death to God, you can also trust your life to God.

It occurs to me that early Christians have borrowed or co-opted pagan holidays and made connections with them to the Jesus story to win converts. Easter is one of those holidays. *Ostara* marked the time, for Druids and other nature worshippers, when light and darkness were nearly equal, with light taking the slight edge. It appears that the pagans have wrestled them away from us again. I think it's time to make them ours once more.

So I invite Redeemer as a community into an Easter life. Give our current culture a new and joy-filled viewpoint of what it means to be a Christian. Love without boundaries. Love without ceasing. See the people who are different from you in any way as fellow beloved children of the one God. Be a nonanxious presence to those who are fearful. Heal the sick even if you aren't able to cure the disease. Make this church home a welcoming place for those in need of welcome.

Finally, don't be afraid to tell them this story. Tell them that there was a man named Jesus who embodied the love of God more than anyone in the history of the world. Tell them that he taught about love and healed people and took risks and defied religious authorities who had forgotten that love comes before law. Tell them that his risks cost him everything but that love would have the last word. Tell them that Jesus is risen from the dead and that everything has a new beginning....even you.

That's how we "Easter" like we mean it.

Welcome happy morning! Love wins! God wins! Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia.