

Easter, Yr. B
April 1, 2018

Here's a report of a conversation between a 4-year old and her mother about Easter: "Mommy, will the Easter bunny bring me purple jelly beans?" "I'm sure he'll bring you jelly beans, dear, but remember Easter isn't about the bunny; it's about Jesus." "But will they be purple?" "Yes, honey, I'm sure there'll be some purple ones in there, but the important thing about Easter isn't the bunny, it's about how much Jesus loves you and me and the whole world." "Mommy, how MANY purple jelly beans will the bunny bring me?" "I'm sure he'll bring you plenty of them; do you know how much Jesus loves you?" "Mommy, will he bring me tootsie rolls, too?"

Those may be the questions when we're four, but they aren't the questions we have now. The questions adults ask, I think, can be boiled down to two: Is the story about the Resurrection true? And, if it is, what does that mean for me? Unlike the questions about the jelly beans, these questions go to the heart of our faith – about what we know about God, about what we can trust, about how we should be living our lives, about where it's all going.

The question about the truth of the story. Our confidence in its truth is based upon several things: first of all on our knowledge and experience that God is trustworthy; that God is about life and love; that we were created in love and for love. It's based on Scripture – based on things like Jesus telling his disciples that he was going ahead to prepare a place for them so that where he was they would be also. Biblical scholars point out that it's based on the fact of the empty tomb and on the appearances after the resurrection that we heard about in our second reading this morning. Our faith is also based on the behavior of the disciples after the resurrection. When you read the Gospel accounts, there are a variety of responses: fear, amazement, bewilderment, confusion and even, in our reading from John, a kind of disbelief. Our text says that John went in and believed but Peter just went home. They went from those responses to being men and women without fear, living out the Gospel message, proclaiming it to the world.

We're a long way in time from those events. And we're children of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment taught us that rationality was a good thing, moving us forward from superstition and ignorance. We've learned that we can come to truth using reason and logic and scientific proof. Those are all good things and they have served us well. But they don't explain everything. More recent scientific discoveries of the quantum world, of sub-atomic particles, have caught us by surprise and taught us that there are still many things beyond our understanding. So, for instance, our neat categories are now not quite so neat. There's a lot we don't know. There's room for surprise. Parenthetically, I think it's rather cool that Easter is on April Fool's Day this year: Jesus coming out of the tomb is surely God's glorious, cosmic SURPRISE!

Scientists have discovered that particles can vanish in one place and appear in another without traveling between the places; they've discovered that particles once related will remain aware of

and respond to one another even after they're separated. They now know that matter and energy are related and that what we always thought of as being totally separate, that is, the material and immaterial worlds, are NOT so clearly separated. Centuries ago, the Hebrews had taught that heaven and earth were connected, not separate. For them, the place of connection was the Temple. But that's also the message of the Incarnation – that in Jesus, heaven and earth, divine and human are connected – here, in this person, and his life and living spirit it's possible for us to experience that same connection.

I'm wondering if a good image for all this is the metaphor of a door. That, as Richard Rohr puts it, "The visible world is an active doorway to the invisible world, and the invisible world is much larger than the visible. This is the mystery of the Incarnation, the essential union of the material and the spiritual worlds." And Christ is that doorway, that gate. Through Christ, his life and death and resurrection, we can open and walk through that door and live in a wider, even an eternal realm.

To go back to kids for a minute, I was asking a grandmother of girls if Easter hats were still in fashion. Apparently not. But I remember being in Texas and sitting behind a little girl who had a new Easter hat. It was round and, at a certain point, she discovered that she could spin it around on her hand, with just a flick of her finger. Amazing! And I thought that that was another good metaphor, because Easter really does send our heads spinning. After all, common sense tells us that dead is dead. We all know the old saying, that the only things that are for sure are death and taxes. I saw a New Yorker cartoon recently that showed the Grim Reaper in a casket, dressed in his black robe, his scythe sticking out over the edge and two people are looking down at him, one of whom is saying, "I had hoped taxes would go first." Clever, but it's Easter humor – death is dead!

On a more serious note, one writer said it this way:

The Resurrection breaks all the rules. Everything is shattered; of former structures nothing is left. Of course, things LOOK the same – there's still death and law and government and banks and time and seasons; but this is like an old skin being shed, a holdover while a new creation is being established. The point is to get wise to this and stop acting, thinking, talking and feeling as though a resurrection had never happened. (William Dixon Gray) Easter – it's about new life, the beginning of the new creation, the beginning of the fulfillment of God's kingdom.

But that brings us to the second question: Given all this, how should we live? And I think the answer there is both simple and complicated. It's simple in that we know that God is on the side of life and therefore, so must we be. Perhaps it's a little more complicated to figure out how to do that. The Resurrection shows us life in a whole new way, it opens a door to a wider understanding about where all creation is headed and the parts we're to play. And because we are assured of our ultimate well-being, assured that all is well, assured that we'll spend eternity in the loving heart of God, we can live lives that are beyond fear – we can, in everything we do and say and touch, be bringers of life – we can be blessings. As followers of Jesus, we're to bring healing and salvation and life and light wherever we go. We're supposed to be raising the dead. One spiritual writer was challenged by a listener who said, "Right, so have you ever raised anyone from the dead?" And her answer was, "Yes, every time I bring hope into a

situation, every time I bring joy that shatters despair, every time I forgive others and give them back dignity and the possibility of a future with me and others in the community, every time I listen to others and affirm them and their life, every time I speak the truth in public, every time I confront injustice – yes, I bring people back from the dead.” (Meagan McKenna)

We'll know the Resurrection from the inside, as it were, at the time of our death. But we can know it right now when we step out and live those lives of love and blessing. I'd like to close with two examples, the first from Scandia. One of the residents there showed me a picture of a number of fellow residents who gathered for a vigil to support the kids from Parkland, Florida – they were sending a card with that picture and words of support to those teenagers. What a blessing: these 70 and 80 and 90 year old people still bringing hope and life and light to the world. And the second is a story from Jonathon Kozol's book, *Ordinary Resurrections*, which is about young kids in the Bronx, living in poverty, struggling against all kinds of odds for a life that will be full and rich and flourishing. Part of the book is about an Episcopal church and the priest there, Mother Martha, who does everything possible to love these children into life. The story is about a little boy named Elio who tells the author about what we would call Asperges, that sprinkling of holy water that we'll execute shortly. Elio says that whenever he's bad or sad, he goes to find Mother Martha and she blesses him. When asked how she does this, he explains that she gets a shiny bowl that contains what he calls "whole-fly" water and she sprinkles it on him with "something like a big spoon." The author goes on to tell of seeing the priest come to the afterschool program holding the bowl of holy water. When the kids saw her, they all ran over – "Bless me, Mother!" "Me, too, Mother." Bless me, Mother," "Bless me!" "Bless me!" "Bless me!" And that's the cry of the whole world, which is longing to be blessed. And that is indeed the gift we can give. Amen.
