

Easter Sunday 2008

For Peter, there was nowhere to run.

For the past two days, everywhere he went, the memories were there, too.

The last words Jesus spoke to him after he cut off the ear
of one of the Temple guards were

“Put your sword back into its sheath.

Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?

One last time that Peter tried to help but didn't get it right.

The last words Peter spoke about Jesus in public were words of betrayal
as the High Priest struck Jesus in the face, Peter said

“I do not know the man!”

And then at that very moment the cock crowed, as Jesus said it would.

When Jesus was led out of the High Priest's home

to continue his walk to Golgotha,

“the Lord turned and looked at Peter”.

That was the last time Peter saw Jesus' face.

So when Mary pounded on Peter's door in the early morning darkness

on the third day and told him the Lord's body was missing

he ran to the tomb.

Maybe running was a welcome relief from the memories.

Maybe he was angry that someone had moved his Lord's body,

his rage boiling to the surface ready to make someone pay in blood.

Or maybe, the words of Jesus before he was killed resonated
and echoed in his heart and mind

“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be handed over

to the chief priests and be crucified

and will be raised on the third day.”

Could it really be true?

Peter ran because there was nowhere else to run

and no one else to run to.

That's how it is once you know Jesus. Nothing else and no one else will do.

As he ran, I wonder if the sun began to peek over the horizon
as God brought light to a new day
and a glimmer of hope within his soul.

If Jesus really did come back to life from the dead
wouldn't this be exactly how he would return?

No press conferences or sound bites.
No self-promotion.
No book tour "I Was Dead and Rose Again: You Can Too in Thirty Days!"

We can't manufacture or plan Resurrection.
All we can do is stand in wonder and awe when we see it
and participate in it when we know its present.

Most of the time Resurrection will take us by surprise
like it did Peter on that first Easter morning
and like it did a Sunday school class about twenty-five years ago.

There was a young boy named Philip
who was born with Downs Syndrome.

He was a pleasant child – and he seemed happy –
but more and more he became aware of the difference
between himself and other children.

Philip went to Sunday school at a Methodist church.
There were nine other eight-year-old boys and girls.
in Philip's third-grade class.
You know how eight-year-olds can be.
Philip was not readily accepted because he was different.

His teacher was creative and helped the group of eight-year-olds
to learn to laugh and play together.
And they really cared about one another, even though
eight-year-olds don't say they care about each other out loud.
But, the teacher could see it. He knew it.

He also knew that Philip was not really part of the group.
Philip did not choose to be different.

He didn't want to be different.
He just was. Sometimes, that's just the way things are.

The teacher came up with a great idea for his class the Sunday after Easter.
You know those containers that look like eggs –
those things that pantyhose come in –
the teacher collected ten of them and brought them into the classroom
and each child was given one of the eggs.

On a beautiful spring day, each of the children was instructed to go outside
find a symbol for new life, put it into the egg,
and bring it back into the classroom.
The kids ran around the church grounds gathering their symbols
and then came back into the classroom.

They put all the eggs onto a table and then stood around the table
as the teacher began to open them one at a time
to share their new life symbols and surprises one by one.

He opened one and there was a flower, and everyone 'oohed' and 'ahhed'.
He opened another and there was a little butterfly.
In another one there was a rock, and some of the children laughed, and said,
"That's crazy. How's a rock supposed to be like new life?"

But, the boy who found it said,
"That's mine. And I knew all of you would get flowers and buds
and butterflies and stuff like that. So I got a rock because I
wanted to be different. And for me, that's new life."

The teacher opened the next one and there was nothing there.
The other children said, as eight-year-olds will say,
"That's not fair – That's stupid! – Somebody didn't do it right."

Then the teacher felt a tug at his shirt, and he looked down.
Philip was standing beside him.
"It's mine," Philip said. "It's mine."
And the children said, "You don't ever do things right, Philip.
There's nothing in there!"

"I did so do it," Philip said.

“I did do it. It’s empty. The tomb is empty!”

There was silence, a very full silence.
For anyone who does not believe in miracles,
a miracle happened that day, about twenty-five years ago.
From that time on, Philip suddenly became a part of that group
of eight-year-old children.

They took him in.
He was set free from his tomb of his different-ness.
Philip died later that year.

His family knew since the time he was born
that he wouldn’t live out a full life span.
Many things had been wrong with his tiny body.
He could not fight off an infection like most normal children could have.

At the funeral, nine eight-year-old children walked up to the altar
not with flowers to cover the stark reality of death.
Nine eight-year-olds, with their Sunday school teacher,
marched right up to the altar, and placed on it an empty egg –
an empty, old, discarded pantyhose egg.

I think Peter ran to the tomb because he remembered
the last look on Jesus face when their eyes met
as Jesus was led from the High Priest’s house into the courtyard
where Peter had just denied Jesus.

The look was not one of condemnation but love.
Jesus did not get what he deserved in this life – crucifixion.
His Resurrection means Peter and all of us do not get
what we deserve either:
The unmerited, undeserved, unshakable love of a crucified and risen Savior.

The tomb was empty.
And because of that, our lives, our hopes, our love, need not be empty.
Our lives, our hopes, our love can be filled
by the One who poured his life out for us.

The Lord is risen! (The Lord is risen, indeed!) Halleluejah!