



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON Easter Sunday 2013

Some of you may know this interesting bit of information but for everyone else- did you know that the date of Easter is determined to occur on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring equinox? Or did you know that most probably the term Easter is connected to an Anglo Saxon spring goddess named Eostre and our celebration of Easter has superseded or taken over an old pagan festival that included the exchanging of Easter eggs.

So as we prepare for this Easter Day, this day of celebration, we find ourselves surrounded by advertisements and photos of cute bunnies, baby chickens, colored eggs, colorful flowers, and beautiful butterflies. All of those things are reminders to us of new birth, new life, the bursting forth of spring. And for many of us, we also add on the purchasing of new clothes for children and sometimes ourselves, the search for Easter baskets and candy, and the preparation of special meals and family gatherings.

All good stuff – happy stuff- joyful stuff – hope filled stuff.

That for me for many years – most of my life really – that all about captured the Easter holiday – the Easter season. That and attendance at a church service. Even as a child – Easter church service was special – mostly because I got to wear my new frilly dress with new white anklet socks, white gloves, and new hat, often new shoes. I always looked good on Easter Sunday.

But I've got to say, that really doesn't capture me so much anymore. I think I've become a hard sell. Easter needs to mean more than happy symbols and thoughts of spring – even if those symbols and the joy they bring are about new life.

For one thing – the new life that comes from an egg, from a cocoon, from a seed or bulb – that new life – while miraculous – is also totally natural – part of nature. I've learned from experience that a tiny, dried up bulb planted in the fall comes forth from the ground with green leaves and hopefully a beautiful bloom. This greening of the earth, this return of spring each year – it is all totally natural – beautiful, appreciated, and part of a natural cycle.

And that's what Mary expected on that day long ago when she headed to the grave where they had laid her Lord and friend a few days earlier. She was going to visit her dead loved one – to pay her respects, perhaps to pray, to remember, to mourn. It was the way of life – life with its sorrows and changes. That was the way life went. But on that day something had gone wrong. She could tell as she approached. The rock in front of the tomb was gone. It wasn't right. It



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probably meant someone had stolen the body. She was frightened and she ran to get others to check it out with her.

And once those two both verified that indeed the body of Jesus was gone, they left her there crying. She probably wanted to mourn the death of someone she loved and now the body of that person wasn't even there anymore. It wasn't right – it was totally distressing.

So distressing that she talked with angels and never questioned who they were and why they were there. So distressing that she assumed Jesus was a gardener or at least someone who could help her find Jesus.

And when he called her name and she answered Rabbouni she slipped back into the relationship she had had with Jesus prior to his death – he was her teacher and there he was back again in front of her. But then Jesus says a huge line – a pivotal line. “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to my Father.” Don't hold on to me. There is no indication that Mary was going to hold on to him – but he came out with that warning right away. Why?

Perhaps it was because he was no longer regular old, normal old, natural Jesus. He was not the same as before. His new life was a resurrection life – a totally changed, unnatural life. He was not fulfilling a natural cycle – no – He had broken all molds, all of the natural rhythms of this world. Not someone to hold on to – to examine, evaluate and classify. This Jesus was not someone to be held on earth. He was and is that which is beyond all miracles.

And that's when Mary got it.- she got it. By being open and accepting of the unknown she met God. And that is Easter and that is where we meet God. We go to the tomb – the empty tomb. We go to the place, the moment when nothing is natural, nothing is explainable – when what is happening, when what has happened is beyond our understanding, beyond the understanding of the brainiest, most knowledgeable among us – beyond what any of us thought possible.

I remember a serious conversation with a quantum physicist, a genius. He wanted to tell me how he knew that God existed. He knew because there are intricate experiments that physicists keep conducting that have a place in them – a moment in them – a warp, a wave that they can't control and they can't explain. That's why he believes God exists – because of a blip of energy they can't explain.

But really, in different ways – that's where we all go to find God- to some place – to some moment that defies anything understandable or reasonable. To that empty tomb where there is a resurrected life waiting for you – a changed life that you can't explain. To that presence that shelters you in the midst of danger. To those events or occurrences that happen and you don't tell anyone else because they defy explanation. To those moments when you feel healing and help knitting you back together to continue on. To that life that is beyond life – to that life that is not going to be explained by any scientist or any other human being – because natural just



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doesn't catch it all. So like Mary – each of us must remain open and accepting of the new and the unknown - to new lives, new possibilities, new creations.

That is Easter. There is our gift. It's the resurrection. It's a celebration of God and life and miracles and meeting God over and over and over again – in the natural, in the unnatural, in the unexpected and the unexplainable. In a moment and a gasp of Alleluia.

Thanks be to God.

I am indebted to Barbara Brown Taylor's sermon "Unnatural Truth" for inspiration.