

Day of Resurrection – Year B – The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony – 4.4.2021

Isaiah 25: 6-9, Psalm 118:1-2,14-24, Acts 10: 34-43, John 20: 1-18

Alleluia, He is Risen! That is the shout that has been heard in Christian Communities for centuries. Alleluia, meaning Praise God, Praise God that Jesus the Messiah and Saviour has risen from the dead as he promised raised to conquer death forever. But what does it mean? How can we understand the conquering of death when we still die? It does not mean that we will live on earth forever, and quite frankly, I don't think I would want to. We were always intended to be born, to live and then to die that was the Creator's plan from the beginning.

I take great comfort in the words of the Book of Common Prayer. These words were written to be part of the Eucharist at a memorial service and are what is known as the Proper Preface. If you have participated in the Eucharist at a memorial service you have probably heard them. Sometimes though in the midst of sorrow, grief and mourning, we miss important things. I cannot explain what happens after death or how we have eternal life. No one can really. But these words are words that express what I believe. These words express my hope in the promise of God and of Jesus. "Jesus Christ our Lord... rose victorious from the dead, and comforts us with the blessed hope of everlasting life. For to your faithful people, O Lord, life is changed, not ended; and when our mortal body lies in death, there is prepared for us a dwelling place eternal in the heavens." We are faithful people, and so this promise is for us. We wait in hope for the fulfillment of the promise that life is changed, not ended. Alleluia, He is Risen, the Lord is Risen Indeed!

Sometimes the best way to understand something is not with our intellect but with our hearts. Sometimes the best way to understand is through a story. I want to tell you the story of Jeremy Forrester and the way Jeremy showed others what eternal life might mean. This story comes from Ida Mae Kempel.

Once upon a time there was a young boy named Jeremy Forrester. It was hard to be around Jeremy. By the time he was twelve, he was still in the second grade. He had been born slow, halting, often unable to control his body that was bent physically. He was in a regular school living far from any special education classes. He'd drool, laugh out loud, cry, and fidget. His teacher often wondered if he learned anything. Her name was Doris, and Jeremy was a constant drain on her attention and teaching. Yet, every once in a while Jeremy would say something profound, his eyes shining and his voice very clear, articulating his words with care. But mostly, he was an irritation and a problem in the classroom. Finally, his teacher made her decision and called in Jeremy's parents to tell them that he had to be removed from her class. She just didn't have the skills and time to attend to his needs and had to honor her commitment to teach the other students in the room. His parents were distraught, and pleaded with her to keep him. A special school was so far, he'd have to board and it would be a terrible shock to him, setting him back, maybe causing him to lose all that he had managed to learn in the past years at school with people who knew him, and cared about him, and even put up with him. She was trying to be fair to her other eighteen students, and she knew that Jeremy had a terminal illness, who knew how long he'd live, but he couldn't read or write and she doubted if he was learning anything. They prevailed; she'd keep him until the end of the year at least.

She practiced patience and tried not to let his noises get to her. He'd bring her an apple and embarrass her with his loud, "I love you, teacher." The class would laugh. The months dragged by, winter lasted so long, but finally it was spring, and towards the end of Lent, she asked the children if they knew what they were celebrating at Easter. She told them the story of Jesus, some of his stories, and how he died on the cross and was buried, but on the third day his Father loved him so and raised him from the dead, brought him back to life. She gave each of the students a plastic egg and told them to go home and bring back something they put in the egg that for them said there was new life. They all were excited and took their eggs. Jeremy sat quietly, staring at her, listening drooling, but she wondered if he understood what he was supposed to do. She decided she'd call his parents and tell them so that he wouldn't make a mistake and disrupt class the next day. But that night everything seemed to pile up and she totally forgot to call them. She only remembered the next day when everyone came with their eggs and put them in the basket on her desk.

Towards the end of the day, it was time to open the eggs. She picked the first one and opened it. Inside was a tiny flower with bright colors. Yes, that's a sign of new life, something that grows from a seed in the ground. Good! And a girl from the back waved her hand and said, "That's my egg." The next one held a gorgeous real butterfly. "Yes, that's good—we all know that butterflies come from caterpillars, changing so much it's hard to believe that it came from that cocoon." One of the boys said, "I need that back. I borrowed it from my big sister's collection." Again, she picked up an egg. This time there was a rock with moss on it. A boy said, "My dad helped me. I found the rock, but didn't know until he told me that moss grows on the rock!" The next egg she picked up and opened was empty. Oh dear, she thought, it must be Jeremy's egg. He didn't understand and I forgot to call his parents. She just closed the egg up and went to put it back in the basket.

But Jeremy was waving his hand and squirming about yelling, "That's my egg. Talk about my egg." What could she say? There was nothing in it. Everyone started laughing again. She tried to calm them down and said, "Jeremy your egg is empty." I know! I know! Just like Jesus's tomb. It was empty too! They killed him, but his Father took him out of the tomb, like you said. He raised him back to life." She was stunned. He had listened and had understood, more than any of the others, more than she herself had understood. The bell rang and school was out. When they were gone, she cried.

Three months later Jeremy died. His whole class came to the wake in the church and everyone who came to pray and comfort one another were surprised to see nineteen eggs sitting on top of his casket—all empty."

For to your faithful people, O Lord, life is changed, not ended; and when our mortal body lies in death, there is prepared for us a dwelling place eternal in the heavens."