

**Don Brown
St. Mary the Virgin SF
Easter Day 11:30 am
4.16,17**

You look like a lovely, forgiving gathering of folks here on this glorious Easter morning and so I want to share a little story about what could have been a terrible tragedy.

A priest and two of his parishioners were driving along a country lane.

Suddenly a rabbit darted out onto the road and it was struck down by the priest's car. He stopped immediately to see if anything could be done for the rabbit.

One of the parishioners looked the scene over and said, "Father, you have really done a number on that rabbit, who must be related to the Easter Bunny. This rabbit is as dead as a doornail."

The priest responded, "There is always hope." And with that he took out a small bottle from a little kit he had in his suit coat pocket. He then carefully poured some of the fluid from the bottle onto the head of the dead rabbit.

After a moment or two, the rabbit opened his eyes, jumped up, took four hops down the lane, turned and waved, then he took four more hops and waved again. The rabbit continued this hopping and waving until he disappeared from sight.

The two parishioners were awe struck and exclaimed, "Father that is surely a miracle. Was that Holy Water you used?"

"No" replied the priest. "It was just a fortunate coincidence that in my pocket I had this little bottle of hair restorer with a permanent wave."

As we all know, rabbits and eggs are two of the symbols associated with Easter. Both symbols have something important in common. If an egg is fertile and cared for in the appropriate way, inside there develops a baby chick waiting to break out into a new existence. Rabbits are known for their prodigious ability to reproduce.

But what happens if the chick living inside the shell refuses to let go of that environment so it can hatch? What happens if the rabbit won't let go of hopping and waving long enough to mate? In both cases there is no new life.

One of the lessons we can learn from the Easter account is the value and importance of letting go. Easter is the major feast day of the Christian year. On Easter we celebrate that in death, Jesus life was changed, not ended. Jesus emerged from the tomb of Good Friday, and was seen and known by many. He was, according to the gospel accounts, the same Jesus but somehow different.

I'm not here today to convince you of the reality of the resurrection. I know this whole concept is a stumbling block, a huge silliness to skeptics and cynics. My experience has been that the impact and power of the resurrection is not a matter of believing something that seems so totally bizarre. No, the truth and power of the resurrection is like the truth and power of love. If you are open it can somehow just sneak up on you.

British theologian C. S. Lewis recounts how one day he was riding in the sidecar of his brother's motorcycle on his way to a zoo. He says that when he left for the zoo, he was a skeptic; and strangely when he arrived at the zoo, he was a believer. He does not really know how that happened but it did.

I think it is possible for all of us to know the power of the resurrection in our own lives. If you are not there yet, don't let that bother you. I'd like you, instead, to look beyond or behind the resurrection to what I'm convinced is the fertile ground underlying the resurrection.

What Easter has taught countless folks from those first disciples until today, is the value and importance of letting go. Easter was the last event in Jesus earthly life where he had spent a lifetime letting go. Early in his ministry, he let go of the prejudices that made many of the so-called religious people reject and castigate others whom they deemed different, unacceptable, people who were to be feared because they were “other.”

In Jesus life he gave of his time and energy so that the blind could see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and in a few instances the dead were given a second chance at life. All that Jesus knew about God and God’s kingdom of love, Jesus gave away to anyone who would listen to his teachings. Jesus gave away his love to everyone, even to those who were his enemies.

Jesus let go of his justifiable right to feel anger and hatred toward those who labeled him a sinner, a blasphemer, a perverter of God’s truth. He chose to give them forgiveness. At the end of his life when he struggled with his impending death, he finally let go of even his fears, and began that final process of letting to. Letting go was how he lived his life.

Jesus’ enemies were people who held on. They held on to a religion of law and obligation to a God they believed was wrathful. They held on to their prejudices toward people who were, in their opinion “not the right kind.” They held on to their positions of power and prestige even when it cost them their integrity to do so. They held onto their money and the stuff they’d accumulated, often by fleecing the poor.

They held on so tightly to the status quo and the way they’d always lived, Jesus’ words and teaching just did not register with them. They just would not let go.

On that first Easter morning when Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John went to the tomb, they discovered that the tomb where Jesus' body had been placed was empty. Soon they began to encounter the resurrected Jesus and they then let go of

their skepticism and knew that Jesus was alive in a new way. This brought them great joy and it can be so for all of us if we will just learn how to let go.

Strangely enough we are better at letting go as children. We learned to walk by letting go of the furniture. We learn to run by letting go of our parent's hands. We learn all sorts of things, some good, some not so good, by letting go of our parent's constant oversight.

Then as we become adults and move into later stages in our life, we start holding on to more and more things and attitudes and viewpoints. We find ourselves not wanting things to change. As we age we often get better and better at holding on, more and more tightly, when what we really need to do is learn how to let go which came so easily to us in our early years. It may be that this is what Jesus had in mind when he told his disciples, "Unless you become a little child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."

If you've come here this Easter Day is full of stuff but you have no clear sense of purpose in your life. Are you afraid of growing older? Afraid that your kids or your spouse or partner will leave you? Do you find yourself without any significant relationships? Did you wake up this morning with a metaphorical Easter basket full of problems and worries, then resolve to spend some time looking inward and discover what it is that you are holding on to.

The Good News of Easter is that Jesus Christ knew how to let go, something he did all of his life, to the point that in his Good Friday tomb he was able to let go of death. In that letting go, God had the freedom to bring him into newness of life.

If you want that new life also, then let today be the day you begin letting go of all that is holding you in the tomb let it go, let it go....so that the power of God can then help you roll away the stone that keeps you locked in that dead end tomb.

Resurrection is not just something that happened in Palestine more than 2000 years ago. Friends, resurrection is something that can happen to you today, if you will just begin that process of letting to. And who knows, that could very well be the tonic that restores the hop back into your step and you might even find yourself giving a wave of joy now and then because you've let go of the temporary in this world and be guided by the permanent love of Jesus Christ.

Friends, Christ is Risen! He lives that we might live. Christ is Risen. Alleluia.