

Year B, April 8, 2018
2 Easter
Christ Church, Mexia

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

“It was a nice Sunday morning after church. My brother and I were playing separately in the back yard. There was a frantic thrashing of bushes that grabbed the attention of us both. Out bounded our dog “Matt,” ferociously shaking a black and white lop-eared rabbit. Matt could not have cared less, but my brother and I knew the rabbit belonged to Mrs. Clausen, the widow next door. There was nothing to do but tell Dad. We knew he had little talent for mending fences, fixing screen doors, or changing spark plugs, but faith and history had taught us that he never encountered a problem that he couldn’t solve.

‘Everything is simple, don’t panic, don’t get excited. Take a second look at situations!’ he used to say. He never knew disappointment, never experienced despair, and never acknowledged failure. We took our rabbit problem to Dad. He studied it in his usual unconcerned manner and told us not to worry. ‘Just hose the little fellow off well so he looks nice and clean. Brush him down with this towel and stick him back in the cage. Mrs. Clausen is still at church. When she comes home and discovers her rabbit, she’ll be upset but she’ll figure it died of natural causes. Oh, and be sure to tie up Matt.’

We did exactly as we were told and then hid in the bushes to see what happened. We saw her come out the back door and head for the cage. Suddenly she began to scream. Between screams, she seemed to be asking God something. Mom and Dad came running out of our house and into her back yard, trying to calm her down. In between sniffs and sobs, she finally exclaimed, “I buried that rabbit three days ago!”

At first blush this amusing story may seem to have nothing to do with today’s lessons. It isn’t a successful resurrection, for example. But let’s see how it may relate.

First, the disciples learned last week that the tomb was empty – that’s all Peter and the other disciple (presumably John) knew. We assume they told the others. Then we know that Mary Magdalene encountered the risen Jesus outside the entrance to the tomb, an experience she also shared with the disciples. Did they believe her? We can’t be sure, but they were still hiding later in the day when Jesus appeared to them. And we know they believed then. But Thomas wasn’t there. When he returns, the other disciples tell him what happened. But he isn’t convinced. Like the woman in the story, he can’t imagine how such a thing could happen – a dead rabbit, buried for three days, but back in the cage – Jesus dead and buried, but talking with the disciples. No, this must be some figment of their imagination. They’ve been cooped up for a several days. Maybe like him, they just need to get out for a while. They must be hallucinating. I have never seen such a thing, I have no experience with this, it goes against everything I know and believe at this time.

Our perceptions dictate how we see things, how we evaluate the information we receive. The children and the father believed the dog had killed the rabbit. Unfortunately, the dog couldn't tell them that he dug him up – no less of a treasure for him, but it would have been a different story for the humans. Mrs. Clausen couldn't understand how a dead and buried rabbit got cleaned up and back into the cage. Was God involved – was it some kind of resurrection? How could a logical person explain it, even if she had remained logical? Thomas couldn't accept what his friends told him. We know from scripture that Jesus had told the disciples he had to die and would be raised from the dead. We weren't told that Thomas was absent when Jesus told them. So, we can assume that he had heard Jesus. If he did, there must be some disconnect, because he isn't acting like he had heard this before or understood what it meant. And these same things plague us as well.

It is very difficult to change how we view the world, expect things to be. It is difficult to realize the assumptions we are always implicitly making. I understand that. We have cognitive habits, values – a sense of right and wrong, and beliefs that affect our thoughts. For example, how many Christians do you think truly believe that Jesus said to love your enemies? -- He couldn't possibly have meant that, could he? No. That is irrational, wouldn't we be at a disadvantage, be extremely vulnerable, if we did that? And surely, he wasn't suggesting non-violence as a way of life. Well, what does the Bible tell us? Fr. Richard Rohr says the Bible is very clear that non-violence is exactly and essentially what Jesus tells us. Yes, that is the way of the cross! And that makes no sense to us, if we view it through the lenses/perceptions of this world. And the resurrection? Like Thomas, do we have trouble with that?

Joan Chittister asked the question, not long after 9-11, the question that blew a lot of minds then and may blow yours now, "What if we could go to 'ground zero' (the site of the former World Trade Center buildings) and forgive, truly forgive?" Think about it. -- All of what we know from this world screams, that would be insane! We would be in grave danger. However, in every Eucharist we celebrate, in the words that Jesus taught us, we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

The problem, I think, is that we read the Bible, and that may be an invalid assumption for many of us, - but if we do, don't we most often try to understand it through the lenses we have received from the secular world in which we live? In other words, we try to make the Word of God fit into what we know and what we believe in this world. We solve the problem of the bunny by the assumptions and rules we think apply to keep us from getting caught/admitting blame, for example.

Now at the risk of sounding like Joan, or perhaps Jesus - I can only hope, what if we took the Word of God as our lenses/our perceptions about the way things should be in order to evaluate what we do or what we believe in this world? -- What would that be like? - viewing things from God's perspective rather than our own?

Alleluia, Christ is risen! That acknowledgement gives us the hope to sustain us in dark times and the ability to NOT fear death, or anything for that matter. It gives us the

courage and the wisdom to seek and to find the Kingdom of God – here and now – without a doubt.

In the name of the One God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.