

Second Weekend of Easter (A/RCL)  
John 20.19-31  
March 30, 2008  
Holy Trinity, Manasquan

We've munched our way through the stash of yellow Peeps at our house, and are about to begin work on the purple ones. As always, I picked out all the red and yellow "jelly bird eggs" first, like a child, eating my favorites first instead of saving them for last, in case someone else moved in on them when I wasn't looking ☺. I'm not kidding myself that when I dip into my Easter basket I'm making the healthiest snack choice in the world. But you've got to admit, what edible Easter gifts lack in nutrition they largely make up for in taste and in the triggering of happy childhood memories.

In Imperial Russia, the long-awaited Easter gift each year wasn't a basket filled with candy, but a jeweled and enameled Faberge egg which often held another expensive treasure inside. The sixty-nine fabulous, famous Faberge eggs are considered priceless. Some of you, too, may have seen the nine of them that used to be displayed in the Forbes Museum in New York City, the largest number housed together outside of Russia. They were costly gifts when they were given and are even moreso now, just over or under 100 years since they were first unwrapped. In 2002 a single egg, the Winter egg, sold for 9.6 million dollars.... On the books, that's got to be the most expensive Easter present ever.

**The** costliest, most precious Easter gifts ever, though, can't be wrapped and just so happen to show up in today's Gospel. They can't be bought and can only be accepted as pure gift. They are invisible gifts that only the risen Christ can give.

**The first Easter present is His presence**, the presence of the living Christ. It was here last week when the sanctuary was full, almost to overflowing, for the Easter Vigil and both Easter Day services. The presence of the living Christ is here this week, too, when there's plenty of wingspan for everyone and our regulars are able to sit in their "assigned" pews with no

competition from anyone! The presence of the living Christ will be in my study on Monday night when three or six of us gather for Intercessory Prayer, and again in the sanctuary at 7 a.m. on Wednesday morning when eight or ten of us gather for Holy Communion. “Wherever two or more of you gather in My name, there am I in the midst of you.” He promises, and so it is. We are not going to see the risen Christ with our human eyes or be invited to place our fingers in the nail marks of His hands or our hand in His side. We will not see Him and yet we will believe He is present, as we do now, present in Word and Sacrament, in brothers and in sisters and in loving service to our neighbor.

Did you notice that when the risen Lord appears to the disciples in today’s Gospel, they aren’t in the Temple or synagogue worshipping? They are far from home, shrinking behind locked doors, starting at every noise, fearful for their lives, spirits sinking in the wake of their Master’s crucifixion. Things couldn’t have gone any worse for any of them. First they deserted Jesus in His hour of need and then He ended up dead. They have reframed their dreams as pipedreams, and their dearest hopes as cruel illusions. It’s got to be important that Jesus didn’t wait for His friends to regroup emotionally or spiritually before He made His post-resurrection appearance. He met them where they were at, frightened, ashamed, despairing.

**This** is a Savior we can love. This is a Savior whom we **do** love. Jesus meets **us** where **we’re** at. He’s not a fair-weather friend who only shows up when there’s something to celebrate. Jesus comes wherever we are, accepts whatever feelings we’re experiencing, passes through the barricades we’ve erected to protect ourselves. Jesus doesn’t wait until our faith revives after an apparent death blow. He meets us in our doubt and even in our downright disbelief. He didn’t condemn the disciples for deserting Him on Good Friday or chide them for not believing Mary Magdalene’s witness to His resurrection. He greeted them in the midst of their fear, guilt, and grief with the words, “Peace be with you.” He greets us in the midst of all our messy emotions with the words, “Peace be with you.” “Peace be with you.” That is the second priceless gift of

Easter. The first gift is the presence of the risen Christ; the second is peace. This paschal peace is a sense of security even in the face of danger, a sense of well-being even in the face of illness or injury, a sense of God being present even when all human comfort is absent.

Oddly enough, the third gift of Easter was received after Jesus showed His friends His nail-scarred hands and feet on that first Easter night. They recognized Him through those “wounds of love,” “the crimson trophies” we sing about in the hymn *Crown Him with Many Crowns*, the physical reminder of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus’ life on the cross. St. John writes,

Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (John 20.20)

That is the third priceless gift of Easter. The first is the presence of the risen Lord; the second is peace; the third is joy. This paschal joy is gladness which outdistances all sadness. We remember Mother Teresa’s words: “Never let anything so fill you with sorrow that you forget the joy of Christ risen.”

After they recognized Him by His wounds, Jesus told His disciples again:

Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.  
John 20.21

Here is the fourth priceless gift of Easter. The first is the presence of the risen Lord; the second is peace; the third is joy; the fourth is mission. We have holy work to do in God’s name. We are commissioned by God as surely as Jesus was to tell and be Good News in this world, to pour ourselves out in love, without counting the cost, to be willing to incur the wounds of love ourselves. The risen Christ is not visibly walking among us any more. The only way the world will glimpse Him is through our faithful mirroring of God’s passionate love in all that we do and say and are.

The fifth priceless gift of Easter is the one that transmits the others: the presence of the risen Christ, the peace that passes understanding, the joy that even death can’t kill, the mission

that gives our lives meaning. The fifth and all-encompassing gift of Easter is the sending of the Holy Spirit into believers' hearts. St. Luke says the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost. St. John says the Holy Spirit came on the first Easter night, as Jesus breathed new life into His once fearful and now forgiven friends.

We too, are once fearful and now forgiven friends, with a loving, beloved Lord who meets us where we're at. The Holy Spirit mediates the presence of the risen Christ to us, allowing us to experience the peace that passes understanding and blessing us with joy that sorrow can't wilt. By the Holy Spirit's power we continue to bring God's passionate love to bear on a hurting and doubting world, risking the wounds of love. These are the priceless gifts of Easter: presence, peace, joy, mission, Spirit. May we both treasure and share them! Amen

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