

“This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it!” AMEN!

It's Easter!
We made it!

With the return of kids,
Easter egg hunts, and larger crowds
we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ
surrounded by sound and song at
St. Stephen and beyond.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!)

We made it! :-)

Siblings in Christ, when I think of
Christmas and Easter, though, I can't help
but put the two up against each other.

I mean, Easter is nice,
but it's no Christmas.

Easter doesn't have the nostalgia of Christmas.

Christmas and Christmas Eve hold most of
our memories and beloved traditions.

There's the waiting for kids to go to bed,
the empty plate of Santa cookies,
the multitude of presents and special dinners,
the hanging of the stockings and,
of course, the decorating of the tree.

Christmas has such a grip on our emotion and
memory that it makes Easter, well,
a bit of a let down.

This has led me to wonder why
we don't have an Easter tree?

I think an Easter tree might be just the thing
to make this day more special and more nostalgic.

We could put egg ornaments on the branches.

Maybe set some of those Marshmallow Peeps up
there on the tree branches like the way
some people string popcorn or cranberries
on a Christmas tree.

Think of the traditions we could build!

Instead of the feeling like we made it through Lent
we can experience the "we made it," in
the creation of an Easter tree.

Really build some nostalgia and family tradition...
it's a kind of "Make Easter Great Again!" slogan.
Americans love that stuff! :-)

At the congregation I served before coming
to St. Stephen, there was a beloved member
that would say to me.

"Pastor Tom, I love to hear you dig yourself
into a hole during your sermons and watch you
try to climb your way out." :-)

Easter gives us permission to laugh;
at ourselves, our slogans, and even to
laugh at death!

But...

Children of God, we already have the Easter tree.

The cross... and we will NOT
be setting Peeps on it! :-)

There is some decoration up there but
most of us don't know how to really
decorate the cross.

And this truth strikes at the heart for us and
points to our problem with Easter.

It's not a "warm and fuzzy" holy day like Christmas.

It's not warm and fuzzy because we still feel
the cold separation of Good Friday.

Easter Sunday stands in the shadow of the cross,
the Easter Tree is in the corner of our eye,
on the day we celebrate the resurrection.

The wounds on Jesus' hands and feet
(actually his entire body because he was
flogged within inches of his life)
do not disappear on Easter.

No matter how cute the bunny is or
how sweet the jelly beans are,
we who really consider this holy day,

know that to forget about the cross
means we diminish the resurrection AND
the triumph of God's work to defeat death.

Resurrection should be a celebration,
the discovery of the empty tomb is glorious for us,
but for those who went there on

the first Easter morning it was doubly traumatic.

Their master and teacher was crucified:
trauma one and now his body is missing:
trauma number 2.

Most Bibles translate the Greek to English using
the word “perplexed,” but more correct is that
they were “terrified.”

Bad had gone to worse when they
discovered the tomb empty.

Their first thought was not that Jesus was resurrected.

They were too terrified and traumatized to recall
that Jesus had told them this was all going
to happen.

When they gathered strength to tell the others,
no one believed them...

They thought it an idle tale... (Pause)

So what might be the things we
hang on the Easter Tree?

What you see is the crown of thorns
but no longer on Jesus head to mock him.

It is there, but Jesus is not, symbolizing

his glorious victory.

There's a linen cloth draped to remind us
of his burial clothes.

What else could we hang on the cross?
(Lilies, whip, sign of "INRI" Jesus of Nazareth,
King of the Jews, butterflies, palms)

We could hang anything that tells
the story of Holy Week which includes
Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem,
his terrible arrest and mockery,
the sham of a trial and his death

as well as the glorious victory over death.

The cross is the hard reality that remains,
in the corner of our eye,
while in the midst of our Easter joy.

The cross... the Easter Tree, must be here.

It is what makes Easter real. (Pause)

Last week marked the 100th anniversary of
the children's story: The Velveteen Rabbit.

When I think of the "real-ness" of Easter,

I think of the story by Margery Williams Bianco.

She describes with perfect detail and beauty
what it means to be real.

(Guest readers come to re-tell this story)

“Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery
than any of the others.

She was so old that her brown coat was bald
in patches and showed the seams underneath,
and most of the hairs in her tail had been
pulled out to string bead necklaces
for children.

Skin Horse was wise, for she had seen
a long succession of mechanical toys arrive
to boast and swagger, and then
by and by break their mainsprings
and pass away,

and Skin Horse knew that those things
were only toys, and would never
turn into anything else.

For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful,
and only those playthings that are old and
wise and experienced understand all about it.

One day, the Velveteen Rabbit asked Skin Horse,
this question:

What is Real?

This was asked when they were lying side by side
near the nursery fender, before nana came
to tidy the room.

“Does being real mean having things
buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”

Skin Horse replied,
“Real isn’t how you are made.
Being Real is a thing that happens to you.

When a child really loves you for a long, long time,
not just to play with, but when a child
really loves you, then you become Real.”

“Does it hurt?” asked the rabbit.

“Sometimes it hurts,” the Skin Horse replied
for she was always truthful.

“But when you are Real you don’t mind being hurt.”

Rabbit asked, “Does it happen all at once,

like being wound up?

Or is it bit by bit?”

“It doesn’t happen all at once, “ said Skin Horse.

“You become... it takes a long time.

That is why it doesn’t happen often to toys
that break easily, or to things that have
sharp edges, or things that have been
carefully kept.

Generally by the time you are Real,
most of your hair has been loved off, and
your eyes drop out, and you get
loose in the joints.

And then, people who aren’t Real
think you look shabby.

But these things don’t matter at all,
because once you are Real you can’t be ugly,
except to people
who don’t understand.” (Pause)

Easter reminds us what is real.

The trauma of life is not erased or

eradicated by magic, but we are given
the chance to remember Jesus' words.

To experience the account of Jesus'
defeat of death for God's creation
to benefit from it.

To recall "That it was impossible for death
to hold Him in its power," Peter proclaimed
that statement on that day of Pentecost.

We need all of this because belief is not
a natural response especially when
we are terrified.

So let that be our first thing to hang on the cross.

Our unbelief can decorate the Easter tree
because it can be very real.

What about the past two years of separation
and death due to pandemic and
its circumstances on health?

Can we hang those on the cross?

Do we hang the suffering and death of people
with Black and Brown skin?

Can we hang the atrocities of war and
violence on the cross?

What about the gun violence of
our nation and within our community?

Can we hang on the Easter Tree the senseless deaths,
the homeless community,
or the hospitalized?

What about the problems our nation has
with incarceration and the legalized slavery
that flows out of the prison system?

Can we hang the unrepentant spirits of our
politicians who bow to political bases,
corporate greed, and the cancel culture?

“If we truly decorate the Easter Tree,”
writes Rector Nancy Fulton,

“then it will display all the pain of the world,
as well as all the joy.”

The crown of thorns and the butterflies are
there on display for everyone to see and feel
because they are REAL,

authentic and true, since we inherit both.

The sufferings and the joys are hung from the tree.

The Easter Tree can bear them all
because it is real, just like you are real and
you are loved and valued and given purpose.

Remember the words... Remember the song...

A new creation comes to life today and
we go restored into the world to share
in the Easter life.

AMEN!