

## **“THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD”**

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

preached on Easter Sunday, April 12, 2009

In the Church we often speak about the Trinity - of God the Father, the Creator; of God the Son, Jesus Christ the Redeemer; of God the Holy Spirit, the counselor who helps us and sustains us in life, through life. Though these three in one are often mentioned, many outside and inside the church have difficulty understanding the concept. Over the years I have talked about it in Bible Studies, but when the teaching is over, the confusion often remains intact. I understand that, and accept it, because it is a difficult concept. But we never seem to have any difficulty understanding the secular trinity - the three that we speak about much more often; the three that are so ingrained into our collective psyche that we teach about them to our children and our grandchildren. We use them to create and maintain some sense of wonder and joy in the hearts of our children. And this morning I want to use one of the members of the secular trinity to help us create some sense of the wonder, to help us remember the joy of faith, the joy in faith if we will only begin to look at the world, to look at God, to look at Jesus, through the eyes of a child.

But who is this secular trinity about which I speak? Certainly you know them - Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and the Easter Bunny. That's a line that I never ever thought I would use in a sermon, and probably one that you never thought you would hear. But when we look at these three characters, we discover that each one carries a certain theology, a personal theology. When we look at these characters through the eyes of a child, what do we see?

The Tooth Fairy, like the Holy Spirit, is around all the time, ready to step in when the need arises. And like the Holy Spirit, we cannot see him or her do his work. It is only after the fact that we can discover that this mystical being has been in our presence. But in order to receive a benefit or reward from the Tooth Fairy, we have to give up something very personal, and sometimes, something very painful. The theology of the Tooth Fairy, seen through the eyes of a child, is that we have to give something to get something. But that theology is not Christian, for that is not what we believe.

Santa Claus is the dominant force in secular society during Christmas. I am not happy about that, but the truth is the truth and we ignore it to our own detriment. At Christmas we celebrate the gift of Jesus, the Savior, that God gave to the world. And then Santa expands that idea of gift giving to phenomenal proportions. But there is a catch. To receive Santa's gifts, we've got to be good. He keeps a list and checks it twice. He is

going to find out who is naughty, and who is nice. But how nice do we have to be to make that "good" list? It is no wonder that kids are sometimes traumatized at the idea of sitting on his lap. There is the terror that Santa will know what we are really like, and when he knows, he will surely reject us. The theology of Santa, seen through the eyes of a child, is a theology of works, that we have to be good, or at least do something good, in order to get something good. But how good do we have to be? That theology is not Christian, for that is not what we believe.

Finally we come to the Easter Bunny who is so prevalent today. Adults often dismiss the Easter Bunny as a leftover legacy from earlier nature-based celebrations of spring's arrival; an innocuous symbol of the new life that is abundant in springtime. It is their mistake. When seen through the eyes of a child, the Easter Bunny is soft and quiet, speechless and huggable. Children eagerly flock to the sides of the mall Easter Bunnies. Sitting on Santa's lap may be terrifying for small children. But hugging the Easter Bunny is a guaranteed Awarm fuzzy," physically and emotionally.

All the strange and supposedly nonsensical traditions that go along with the Easter Bunny are kept alive and reinvented each year by children. How many households without children color eggs and hide nests around their living rooms? How many households with children would color eggs and hide nests if the children didn't insist on that messy and bothersome rituals? Adults would not do such things for themselves. We do it for the kids. I know that sometimes the kids are in their 20's and 30's, but still we do it for the kids. We don't do it as adults because we know the appeal of the Easter Bunny is illogical. It doesn't make any sense. But then, the idea that Jesus, being with God, fully equal to God, would leave his perfect home, would empty himself of all power and privilege to come and be with us, to be abused and abandoned by us, to willingly die on a cross for us, and then come back to be with us again. That doesn't make any sense either.

Now Santa fits neatly into an adult-centered system of rewards and punishments. There is justice here. Be nice, get presents. Be naughty, get nothing. Santa Claus has a job. He employs elves to work for him, creating all those gifts we receive. Santa is a successful guy. But the Easter Bunny is something else. We don't know where he goes in the off season. Apparently off some place to produce those eggs, like a hippy artist hanging out in the shadows and fringes of society. He comes to children without a set policy for behavior. It doesn't matter how they have behaved in the past. His decorated egg treasures are left everywhere, easily accessible to even the smallest child or the poorest seeker. The mute Easter Bunny doesn't appear to espouse any particular system for

punishments and rewards, and his symbols don't seem to make any sense. The theology of the Easter Bunny, as seen through the eyes of a child, is one of loving simply for the sake of love; of giving simply because we are here. And that is very Christian at its heart. For that is what God tells us, what Jesus shows us. And that is what we believe.

This morning I want you to look at the world through the eyes of a child. On Christmas morning, the point of presents is to unwrap them and see what wonderful gifts we have received. The point of the Tooth Fairy is a tangible, spendable reward under the pillow of a child who has lost a tooth. But on Easter morning, the reason for rising early is to go on a hunt, to seek out the nests of colorful eggs that have been hidden throughout that most familiar of all places, our own home. The fun, the fulfillment, is in the search, not in stock-piling a cache of hard-boiled eggs. How many kids care about having the eggs. The excitement is in finding them, sometimes asking that they be hidden again so the excitement, the wonder and joy of discovery can be experienced once again.

This morning we need to look at life, to look at God through the eyes of a child. There is nothing you can do to make God love you any more than he does at this moment. And there is nothing you can do to make God love you less. The resurrection of Jesus proves that. He did not offer us the gift of salvation because we were so good. Our military forces in Iraq discovered all sorts of evidence that reminds us of just how cruel humanity can be. Torture and rape rooms, the imprisonment and mistreatment of children so that their parents can be broken, terrified, and kept in line. The media regularly tells us stories that depict the depths of depravity to which humanity can fall. Or we can travel to Washington to tour the Holocaust Museum. But be prepared for humanity is on display at its very worst. There was no respect for the individual, no acceptance of rights or righteousness, and definitely no room for grace.

But that is not very new. In fact, humanity has not changed much over the centuries. For long ago the people of Jerusalem, both Jew and Gentile, violently interrupted the sacred and solemn celebration of the Passover with cries for blood. Cries that brought forth a very brutal death and the utter destruction of a peaceful man of God; a man who was God. But still Jesus comes back to us. He did not die for all of us. He died for each of us, that we might have new life. He died for us and he came back to us in the very same way, with his arms wide open, loving us still.

Why does Jesus offer us this gift of grace? It is not that we deserve it. Nor do we receive this gift as the result of a sacrifice that we made. Jesus took the punishment for our sin

upon himself. Humanity had separated itself from God at the very beginning of history. Since the beginning of time the Lord has called to us through Abraham and Moses, through the law and the judges, through prophets and the psalms. We were called to make the effort, to offer the sacrifice. But when it proved insufficient, it was Jesus who made the sacrifice - first to come to us, leaving the glories of the heavens for a world littered with sin and death. And then to die for us on a lonely cross at Calvary. And when we sacrificed him, when we hung him on that cross and laid him in the tomb, after he paid the price of his life so he could redeem ours, he came to us again.

Like that legendary bunny, the empty tomb stands as a silent witness giving a most powerful testimony of the victory of life over death. And the witness isn't just for some. It is there for all the world to see - male or female; Jew or Gentile; for the red and yellow, the black and white, for they are all precious in the sight of the Lord, for we are all children in the eyes of the Lord. And we are called to receive this marvelous news of resurrection with a simple, unshakable faith, like the faith of a child filled with wonder and joy, And we can only do that when we look at the love of God, when we look at the resurrection of Jesus through the eyes of a child.

Jesus comes to us just as we are, without a set policy for behavior. It doesn't matter how we behaved in the past. His grace is available anywhere and everywhere, easily accessible to even the smallest child or the worst sinner. He comes with arms wide open, loving us simply for the sake of love. He comes offering life, giving simply because we are here. And when we see him, through the eyes of a child, we feel the excitement of a hope that chases away all fear; of a light that eliminates all darkness; of an assurance that removes all doubt; of a love and a life that will not, that cannot be taken away. And today, we get to experience the excitement all over again.

Today may you look at the resurrection of Jesus through the eyes of a child. May you receive him with the simple, joyful faith of a child. And may you go forth to tell the world with the excitement of a child, that all may become a child of God this day. For Jesus has risen, and in him there is life. And in your life may you know it is true. In your life may it be so. Amen.