

Welcome to Trinity Church on this glorious Easter morning. It was wonderful hearing Taylor read *The Giving Tree* to the children this morning. And I always forget how the book just breaks me up every time. When my sons were very little the story just seemed like a nice little tale about a boy and a tree. But as my sons got older they realized the depth of the sadness of the story. So, I emailed all my guys this last week and asked them if they read the book to their children, and how the book affects them now.

For me the book is a metaphor for the people in this world, and one person in my life, my Nana, who gave everything they had out of love. It is about love and great sacrifice. In this idyllic rural setting here in Lime Rock we are far away from city streets, sirens and the memories of 9/11 that the recent attacks in Paris and Brussels bring back to us. We surely can think of the stories of many, many brave men and women who have given their lives in these horrendous, senseless events so that others could live. Those heroes will live on in our hearts and memories to give us an example of the best of human nature.

Today on the day of Resurrection we come to Church remembering that a tree played a sad role in the death of Jesus. It was on a tree that he was crucified. The Gospel of Luke records that two criminals were crucified with Jesus, one on his left and one on his right. We have learned through historical records by Josephus and others, that an oft-used way of killing criminals and troublemakers in first century Palestine was to crucify them in great numbers along the major roads. These gruesome road signs served as a reminder that if one become a threat to the Roman rule, there were dire consequences.

Luke wrote in the Acts of the Apostles that they put him to death by hanging him on a tree. How could this valuable gift of God, a rare resource in the dry and desert-y climate of Palestine, be used for such an ugly purpose. But the tree of death becomes for us the tree of life. A green and living tree is a wonderful metaphor for God's never-failing love for us in Christ Jesus.

The Gospels record that because of Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus did not stay on the cross of wood long after his death. He was taken down and lovingly laid in a new tomb. He was buried with a large stone rolled in front of the tomb.

At dawn, on the first day of the week, the followers of Jesus were confused and despairing. The way Luke tells the story, the women were first perplexed, and then terrified. Later, the men called it an idle tale, and then still later, Peter was amazed when he went to see for himself and found the tomb empty.

If you have wondered about The Resurrection, whether it really is just an idle tale, you are not alone. Who could believe such a thing? Perhaps someone actually took the body of Jesus. He couldn't have possibly been raised bodily from the dead. It must have been His Spirit that the disciples experienced.

People do not rise from the dead. But, the Gospel writers, and Paul, are emphatic about the resurrection. It is truly a mystery. We take it on faith. There are many things we take on faith with only evidence that we can trust to give us assurance. Seeing alone is not ALWAYS needed for believing.

Yesterday, I was walking a hiking trail near my home. I gazed up at the very blue, cloudless sky, and the grey branches of the bare trees that fill our forests here against that sky. It was our accustomed beautiful and yet stark winter sight. Easter is so early this spring that there are very few buds on the trees yet. If you were a new arrival to our world and you saw the trees of our woods right now, you might think that all of them were dead. It's hard to believe that, in another month or so, the forest will come to life, and our part of the world will once again be a green and verdant place. Try as you might to convince a stranger that the trees are alive, how would he or she believe you? There is no immediate evidence.

The tree has been for human beings a staple of life, a part of God's incredible goodness to us in making all creation, and then giving that creation into our hands for our use. Throughout our human history, especially in climates such as ours, it has been very difficult to live without trees. We use them to keep us warm, to cook our food, to protect us from the elements, to travel in wagons, to go to sea and discover other parts of the world. We also have used wood in weapons to fight against savage beasts, and our enemies; making bows and arrows, and spears.

And, because we are human we have abused this resource, cut down or burned wide swaths of forests, and denuded hillsides that become unstable without the root structure of trees. Fortunately, now, paper making companies plant as many trees as they cut down, and we have, by and large, switched to other fuels to heat and to cook. I even have a new deck on my house built of (in part) recycled plastic.

In the Prophet Isaiah's passage for today about God's love and care for the people of Israel, he writes about the new Jerusalem where people can live and flourish in peace and health and happiness. He foresees a time when the people will live such long lives that their lives will be compared to the life of a tree – strong, sturdy, ever-present, ever-giving to others of its shade, its fuel, and its ability to provide shelter. They were a people who had suffered much at the hands of their enemies. And Isaiah assures them...and he assures us today, that God's great desire for us is for peace, happiness and long life, not one cut short by evildoers.

My sons all wrote back to me about their memories of the Giving Tree. They talked about God's ongoing and never-failing love, about the human's tendency to take, take, take, and about love shared in beautiful poetry read from one generation to the next.

The God who has created all things and given them into our care, has made us the stewards of creation. Jesus burst forth from the tomb, and we will shortly see life burst forth from death in the green shoots which will burst forth from the ground as the days get longer and warmer. Thanks be to God for creating and sustaining our planet, and for bringing us to new life through Jesus Christ.