



# TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*on the Branford Green*

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

*Like sweet peaches...*

**The Rev. Sharon Gracen**

*May 1, 2011*

Easter is a windfall. I've decided that I really like that as a theological term. It's an old word, the first recorded usage dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and referred to a tree or its fruit that has been knocked out of the tree by wind. It is like a gift lying on the ground waiting to be collected. In this word, we have the wind, the *pneuma*, the Greek word that means wind and Spirit, as the agent that brings the fruit, which brings to mind another way we talk about Jesus, the first fruits of creation. This windfall is ready to be gathered to ourselves. It is also something that comes after a storm. Easter as a windfall is a blessing that we had no reason to expect – no reason to expect that God might respond to the harmful exercise of human power with such love and generosity. In one cosmic moment in the tomb – death was changed into life, despair was banished, making room for hope, a brutal ending became a beautiful beginning. In Jesus resurrection, we say that humanity is restored. However, to the disciples behind locked the doors and shuttered windows, Jesus' resurrection had not automatically ushered in the hoped for Kingdom of Heaven. They were aware of a world not changed. Their fear is an indication that the work of Easter had barely begun.

The first work of Easter is the necessary shift in perspective from something that happened to Jesus to something that happens within us. The disciples, quaking behind locked doors have heard the news, for the women brought it to them, Mary Magdalene had even told them that she had talked to him. But at this point of the story, that's all it is to them, a wonderful story. It's as if someone came upon a windfall and stood there admiring the peaches on the ground. We are no different, we've heard the story and we love the day, with its wonderful music, colorful flowers and Easter bonnet but does it really change us?

Here's an image that I hope will help you. I remember reading a story once about a young girl carrying an ember in a special container through a forest, desperately trying to get it to her home so that they could cook and be warm. Before matches, that's how fires were kindled. They were shared. People who traveled would carefully pack up an ember from the morning's fire and take it with them. The embers had to be carefully tended, lest they consume themselves or go out for lack of oxygen. The ember is another great image for Easter. What happened in the mystery of the tomb is a gift for us. But it is like the ember in need of tending. On its own, it will not do much; it will just be a story, a glowing coal. But with that ember, we are in possession of hope. We have the potential of light and warmth and the community that always gathers around a fire. But it will not survive without our active acceptance and commitment to the gift.

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True Easter is much more of a process than an event. Easter is the beginning of something. It doesn't automatically save the world or take our grief away. Easter hasn't put an end to sin but it gives us a different context within which we design the rest of our lives.

The disciples were hiding, Heaven knows where Thomas was. And suddenly Jesus materialized in their midst and the story moved closer. But I still don't think they understood what was expected of them. Resurrection to them was something that had happened to Jesus and they were glad to see him. My Lord and my God! But it was still like peaches on the ground. They didn't know that it's the gift that will invade them and help them to see Christ in everyone, everywhere. In most of the stories of Jesus' post resurrection appearances, the disciples didn't even recognize him. They had not yet learned how to recognize Christ with a different face, in a different situation. Learning to do that is the work of Easter.

The Easter process is different for everyone because we're all in different places. Some of us are here today grieving, facing life without a loved one. Some are reeling from being laid off. Some are celebrating new beginnings, babies and new jobs. But there are some ways in which Easter is the same for all of us. We've all been given something, and we've also have the capacity to use it and let ourselves be made new. The process of Easter begins with awareness. What in our everyday experience contributes to the world that continues on as if nothing has happened? It's anything that looks, feels and sounds like anger or fear. It is anything that pushes our buttons that we start to stew about it. Those are the moments in which we can begin to practice newness.

For Easter, someone gave me a little book by a Buddhist scholar named Pema Chodron. It has in it the best explanation of the Buddhist concept of non-attachment that I've ever heard. I had never thought that non-attachment made sense for Christians as we are called to live passionate lives, to have passion for the Kingdom of God just as Jesus did. But now with this understanding I suddenly see that non-attachment is the Easter process.

Pema Chodron says that in those moments of anger, fear, discomfort and button pushing we experience a hardening of our hearts – our hearts become rigid. When you start to pay attention to this, you can actually feel it. Once your heart is rigid, your reactions can look just like the thing that set you off. "How dare she say that to me!" "Can you believe what they just did!" "You'll pay for that!" Learning non-attachment is stopping yourself from the angry, bitter reaction and sitting still with the discomfort. Which is so unsatisfying at first. I love my righteous indignation and I'm really good at it. But I'm also beginning to grasp that every time I react that way, my rigid heart closes me off from something or someone. It certainly closes me off from spiritual growth. The ability to keep my heart softened and let the discomfort dissipate, whether that discomfort is fear, anger, resentment--you name it--we all have closets full of them. The ability to sit patiently and allow it to dissipate without joining in the fray is the beginning of peace. It is the fanning the ember of Easter within you.

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I began the week assuming that I was going to produce a low Sunday type of sermon and that you might appreciate another week of lightened up rhetoric. But these ideas came together and I think they are really important for us, so I want to recap these three ideas. Easter is a gift – one that we didn’t and indeed couldn’t earn. It’s grace. It’s free peaches fallen from a tree waiting for us to scoop them up and make something fabulous. The worst thing that you can do with a windfall is to keep it for yourself. It’s been given to you to share and bring delight to others.

Easter isn’t something that happened to someone else, a long time ago. It is an ember put into your care to bring light and warmth to the world. To help it produce the flame that it is meant to be, you have to fan it, give it your own breath and feed it. In the light of the flames you will be able to know Christ everywhere.

Accepting the gifts, Easter requires that we no longer let our hearts be hardened against people, ideas and situations. That is daily work, sometimes hourly. The practice of non-attachment – not letting ourselves become hooked by negative reactions – allows us to live as Easter people. Jesus didn’t let himself be trapped by anger as he was betrayed; he didn’t lash out at those who mocked and beat him; he didn’t rail at God. As a result, we have the gifts of Easter. We are also honored by the work given to us. God must think that we are ready to be stewards of these gifts. God must believe that we can make something wonderful with these gifts. It’s peace and it smells like warm, sweet peaches.

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