

Easter 2011
Acts 10:34-43
Ps. 118
Col. 3:1-4
Matthew 28:1-10

Your God is Too Small, was the title of a book with a burgundy cover I saw on my parent's bookshelf.

Easter invites us to a larger view of God.

Our Confirmation class students put questions to us about the largeness of God, which are also at times my questions, perhaps your questions: What is the meaning of life? Who is God? Who am I? Do we really change for the better? Did Christianity come about because people didn't want to face the fact of death? Is that all there is to it?

When I've asked the Confirmation class to write about a God in whom they could believe, they write of an all-inviting God, who comforts and makes people feel welcome, and heals the world's hurts, such as racism, and war, and environmental degradation.

More often than not, underlying the questions is a yearning, a wistful hope mixed with doubt that the world and the God that they would want to believe in, is or perhaps is not possible. Brother Roger of the Taizé community once said: "At the depth of the human condition lies the longing for a presence, the silent desire for a communion. And then he gives a remarkable conclusion: This simple desire for God is already the beginning of faith."

Perhaps you have that simple desire today. Perhaps it has grown dim through disappointment or grief, or disappointment; or perhaps it is ready to blossom forth like a forsythia branch, which needs only one day of sunshine to unfurl brilliant yellow blossoms.

You may be like those disciples and friends of Jesus, who were in deep grief and shock after his death. Ready to go back home, in deep disappointment. Not much has changed, after all. Yet, much as a sunrise, which begins in a softening of darkness, then grey, purple, rose, yellow, light, the disciples and friends, with their eyes saw something beautiful and new and hope-filled.

Jesus was still alive! Peter, James, John, Mary, and all the others who had followed Jesus, felt Jesus alive, and they told each other the stories of how they had encountered a burst of unconquerable love: in an empty tomb where Jesus' body had been laid after the crucifixion, in angelic encounters, in appearances of Jesus when they were walking on the road, and in breaking bread. They didn't at first recognize him; their understanding needed illumination. Something new that changed the world had happened, and they needed time to catch up!

All these stories in the Gospels and in Sr. Paul's writings, are stories of joy, and wonder, that gave two very important teachings that the first Christians came to trust: Jesus lives here now; he did not stay dead! And God has vindicated Jesus. Another way to say these teachings: Although the worldly powers of the Roman Empire and the entrenched religious establishment killed Jesus, God raised him from the dead.

The resurrection is the supreme intervention of God in human history. No one saw it; no biblical writer describes it. What died is imperishable, weak, mortal; what rises is imperishable and immortal.

You all know the book Charlotte's Web by the famous author E.B. White? Charlotte, (like I imagine God), has a warm and soothing voice, and befriends Wilbur when he is very lonely. She helps Wilbur when he finds out from the old sheep that he is going to be killed and eaten for Christmas dinner. She rides with Wilbur in the Arable family truck to the county fair; and she writes words above his web: "some pig," "terrific," "radiant," "humble." He grows into feeling terrific and radiant and wins an award, so he is saved from death. And, perhaps he grows in helpfulness and humility, too, as he realizes!

But then Charlotte in the way of nature, grows old and is preparing to die. But Charlotte, like God, like Jesus, never stops showing Wilbur how wide the possibilities for life are. And she then calls him into action. Having been saved, he has work to do! While they are still at the fair, she asks Wilbur to take the egg sack with all her unborn children in his mouth, to protect it, (and is it the writer, E.B. White's, intent to remind us of Holy Communion)? Wilbur does so, while his crate is loaded by the family and taken back home to the barn. Wilbur carefully places the sack in the barn. And in the fullness of time, emerge a dazzling number of Charlotte's children. He's delighted but grows concerned as many leave for the wider world, actually launching

themselves into flight as baby spiders do. But three stay behind with him. And the story concludes with him looked delightedly at three of Charlotte's children, three webs in the barn's doorway. The Trinity?

One moral of the story is to never kill a spider, she might be Charlotte! Another larger moral: Whatever creature we are, we are terrific, radiant, because everything was created and is held together by the living, loving God shown most fully in Jesus Christ.

And, here is where we can see the full dawning light. The resurrection revealed that Jesus' teachings were enduring and true. Central to Jesus' teachings, the great pearl of wisdom, is Jesus' invitation to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength and neighbor as self.

But who is one's neighbor, a famous biblical character asked. Jesus answers in the story of the Good Samaritan, the Beatitudes and Lord's Prayer, and by radical table hospitality (eating with everyone!), and by teaching people to learn from birds and lilies, Jesus invited people into a beautiful land lighted by the sun of God of mutual relationships among human beings and in the web of creation itself.

In this beautiful community of love, we Christians like Wilbur are meant to be more than responsible citizens, but even leaders.

Love is not so much a feeling as an intention. Sometimes love is known in heartsickness, when hope for healing is dashed, or delight in a new hoped-for outcome in love or work leads to a dead end.

Love is much more than a feeling; it is a hope directed in an Easter direction, toward the kingdom of God, of peace, justice, and harmony. This hope turns from egotism and anxiety to open heartedness and openhandedness to passion for justice and abundance for all, even for oneself.

Martin Luther left the monastery to proclaim the priesthood of all believers. He came to believe that in whatever job or vocation we happen to be, we can live Jesus' invitation to love. And in this school of love, we are continually invited by Jesus to see ourselves as learners about loving God and neighbor. "None of the things with which you deal daily are too trifling to tell you this incessantly," he wrote, "if you are but willing to hear it; and there is no lack of such preaching, for you have as many preachers as there are transactions,

commodities, tools and other implements in your house and estate [read “your work environment”] and they shout this to your face: ‘My dear, use me toward your neighbor as you would want him to act toward you with that which is his.’” (Barbara Brown Taylor, An Altar in the World, p. 111).

“And God wants us to learn how to truly “see.” *See* the endangered natural world that requires our care; *see* the common humanity that binds us all when politics, nations, races and war threaten to separate us from one another. God wants us to *see* ourselves as whole, loved and loving human beings.” (Becky Gould, sermon on shepherds)

So, God opens our eyes to God’s doing a new thing; we don’t see it completed yet, but it will in part happen through us. So this Easter pray, cry, do a cartwheel, go out of your way to give to someone in need, tell each family member and friend that you love them; think differently about your future, pray for someone you have never met in a part of the world you will not visit (at least you have no plans now to do so), nourish a God given talent, smell the grass or a lily—all these and many other exuberant, different actions are called for on Easter day.

Charlotte’s creator, E. B. White, also said, "I arise in the morning torn between a desire to save the world and a desire to savor the world. This makes it hard to plan the day."

Both are Christian!

Amen.