

Texts: John 12.20-26; 1 Corinthians 15.35-49

April 1st, 2018 (Easter)

*“The shell must be cracked apart if what is in it is to come out;
For if you want the kernel, you must break the shell.”
--“Meister” Johannes Eckhart*

EASTER AS ARCHETYPE

--Let me tell you right up front. This morning, we are jumping straight into the deep end. We have to. As an Interim, I don't have ten years to prepare you for what is about to be said--maybe nine years, but not ten. It's worth the risk that you might not yet understand completely, but it's that important to put words to it.

We already grasp that Easter lies at the very core of who we are and what we do as Christians. Without Jesus' rising, there simply is no Christianity. Over the years, then, we've heard dozens of perfectly-agreeable (and perfectly-forgettable) sermons on that subject, all intended duly to impress that fact upon us.

OK, we get that we are an “Easter-people,” but the question-of-all-questions still stares us in the face: What real difference has knowing that made in us? Quite clearly, what we have yet to understand with any depth or fullness is that all that dying-and-rising talk is not just about Jesus; it's about us.

So, this occasion bids us to go deeper than where we're accustomed to going. It beckons us to take it down several rungs into much-less-familiar places. And that compels us to think about Easter in a very different way--in a symbolical way. As today we go through the motions of celebrating it, let us fathom the deep thought that beyond anything that Easter is at the surface level, it is fundamentally an archetype of human experience.

--To call it “archetypal” sounds exotic, and maybe even incomprehensible. What I mean by that is that there is something related to the way the events of Easter are remembered which resonates within the very structure of the human psyche itself. There is something inherent in the very way that the stories of Jesus are cast and passed along which conveys a truth lying at the very heart of every human being, one just waiting to be sought out and discovered, yearning to be explored and expressed.

What makes our Easter-remembrance archetypal is that there is a central dimension to it that is part of the basic seed-nature of every human being, across space and time. Every culture throughout history possesses its own rituals and myths which testify to the very same truth about humanity's utterly extraordinary possibilities.

There is a fabulous and scary secret here, one which is about to be shared with you, in the hope that, on this Easter, you can afford it some hospitality within yourself.

Actually, this profound secret has already been voiced in each of this morning's two readings. The odds are great, however, that we missed it both times, lost as it was in its setting of all those other mind-numbing sentences, destined not to be heard because of the curious correlation within Christians between opening the Bible and going unconscious. The truth be told, there is that aspect to us that does not want us to know this secret.

If you really would know it, you have only to open ear and heart for the next minute or so, as it is carefully lifted out of its wordy context and reverently set before us. Before we proceed, though, there should be some full disclosure here. We need to be forewarned that if we let this secret in, if we deliberately access and honor the symbolical message here, then we can never be the same again. Therefore, if you want to leave, I will understand completely.

OK, then, here's the secret:

- “What you sow does not come to life unless it dies” (1 Cor 15.36). That's Paul the apostle who is sharing the secret.
- “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12.24). Putting images there to the secret is Jesus himself.

These harmless-sounding little sayings represent the core-mystery to our faith. As we tell our Christian version of the universal truth, is that not what we believe occurs at Easter? A dying and burying, then a rising and living in new form? Of course it is.

Appreciating these paradoxical words, not just at the usual traditional level, but at this archetypal level, we cannot avoid the implication that the call of Easter is aimed through Jesus and straight at us. What we sow does not come to life unless there is first a dying (and we're not speaking at all here of physical death). If a grain insists on remaining just a grain, there will be nothing more. For there ever to be a sprout, a stalk, a full head of fruit and seed, there needs first to be a dying. There is no other way to our greater life--which is what is crystallized in the notion of the resurrection, Jesus' celebrated rising representing our possible “rising.”

--If we have any capacity for symbolical thinking, then we perceive that Easter's not quite as simple as the orthodox formula of Jesus' having done it for us, and that since he has died, we don't really have to. Seen in this symbolic light, Jesus can be said to do it the way that he does it so that we can grasp the truth that, if we in fact belong to him, we must do it, too. That's what it means to follow him--to follow him, not just with some of our words or behaviors, but all the way, all the way through the cross of self-sacrifice, to something new and marvelous on the other side. It brings a whole new level of meaning to the mantra that Jesus has died for us.

I know, it may seem odd that, on an Easter morning, so much time and energy should be dedicated to what sounds like Good Friday material. But that's only because, for a variety of personal reasons, we'd like to avoid that Good Friday part altogether--you know, with all that loss and pain and suffering. However, as the great secret here underscores, that sort of avoidance doesn't really serve us very well.

You see, the archetypal fact reveals that there is no way to get to the rising without a dying. If we are successful in shrinking back from the cross, from our own cross of what needs to be offered up and let go of, we merely settle for the smallest possible life. That is tantamount to the grain insisting that it remain forever a grain, “Easter” never truly coming to it. In short, if we are filled with dread and fear and resistance about the dying part, then we are not yet ready for the rising part.

--Though generally it may be only rarely referenced, occasions of Easter inevitably lead us in the direction of this archetypal truth: If the new, higher, superior life is to emerge from the darkness, stretch its limbs, stand up, and move out with momentum, then the old, cramped, stiff, inferior life must be allowed to breathe its last and decay.

So, people now of the Easter-secret: If we are to live deeply and abundantly, what first needs to be sacrificed?

As persons and as a people here, if we are to flourish and to thrive, what needs to go which is preventing that from happening?

Whatever it is, it is the stone that must be rolled away from in front of the door of what is entombing us.

Now--on this occasion of chocolate bunnies, colored eggs, and fluffy chicks--there's a rather thorny thought to take home with us!