

Meditation on Easter
Calgary, April 2010
for website
Rev. Fran Dearman

I'm never really sure what to say at Easter. We could engage the drama of the gospel stories. We could explore theologies making meaning from those stories. Or we could go with bunnies. Bunnies have always worked well for me.

My cousin had a rabbit, once, a beautiful big white rabbit with ruby eyes. Little did my cousin know that his mother, my aunt, harboured a passion for rabbit stew. But, with motherly care, my aunt restrained herself during the years of the ruby eyes.

Bunnies are bouncy and lively and pregnant with possibilities. One meets bunnies in unlikely places: bounding up paths zigzag across the trail, or motionless under a moonlit tree.

Once, when I was stranded at a luckless bus stop, considering the possibilities, I glanced towards the verge and there, in the grass, was a small brown rabbit. I half expected him to haul out a pocket watch and tell me that he, too, was about to be late. A tad surreal, as bunnies go, but perhaps he did amend my fortunes, for transport appeared most unexpectedly, within minutes, more by good luck than good management.

So this year I'm going with bunnies.

Mind you, there is indeed strong human drama in the gospel stories. As a scholar, I am intrigued by the threads of story that guide each gospel along its unique path. As a human being I find the elements and themes compelling.

Consider the forty days Jesus spent, searching for truth in the desert, and renouncing the temptations of power. Have you never stepped aside and gone apart, to search for your true path?

Consider our hero all alone, with no one to keep awake with him and watch through the night in the garden of Gethsemane. Have you never felt so all alone?

As one who studied archaeology I find myself especially drawn to the story of Peter, huddled in the Roman courtyard, keeping watch at a distance as his friend faces the machinery of Roman imperial power. I have seen and touched the stones of that courtyard. The *lithostratus* they call it, a plain of great hard paving blocks, all that remains of the old Roman palace in Jerusalem. Three times Peter will deny his friend, before cockcrow.

Have you never denied a friend? Or been denied? Have you never walked away from an empty tomb?

This story of the ministry and death of a young rabbi is filled with human hopes, human desires, and despair, and hope again. I'm glad I know it. I'm not sure I know what it means. I suspect it means something new each time we meet it.

I would commend to you a film called *Jesus of Montreal*, in French, with English subtitles. The film describes a group of actors who have come together to present a drama of the story. But slowly the ancient story becomes their story.

Jesus of Montreal is the most intelligent, informed, and nuanced reading of the gospel stories that I have yet seen.

Jesus of Montreal stands in stark contrast to Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion*, which tells the story, powerfully and effectively, as atonement theology. By atonement theology I mean the perspective that atonement --at-one-ment with the holy-- is achieved by the sacrifice of Jesus, that Christ died to free humanity from sin.

Now, I was raised a Unitarian since the age of eight. For me, Jesus is a man who teaches by his life, not a god who saves by a bargain with death. For me, humanity is finite, the holy is infinite, and the economy of any bargain between them I scarcely begin to understand.

That there is a power in this theology, I do observe in others. I can see that for some, this works. It is a powerful notion, that we are so important the world is rocked and riven for our salvation, that we are so important God would die for us, that somehow we will live forever.

We will live forever, in the dance of the atoms, borrowing and returning the stuff of life in our turn. That is all I hope for, and to be remembered by those I love.

And may there be green grass in plenty for the rabbits, hares and bunnies. Spring can be a hard and hungry time, as the world comes awake.

New life brings new hope. But old sorrows linger, also. Some empty tombs are harder to walk away from than others.

I need a theology of spring and renewal that acknowledges the hard and hungry times, as well as the greening of hope, and the living a life of hope and gratitude, knowing full well that the innocent do suffer, and all the beauty we have known will someday slip through our fingers.

I need a theology of relentless optimism. I need a theology of hope.

I love Easter. I depend utterly on the return of spring each year, and the renewal of the world. I know I cannot bargain for it. I can only wait, in loving trust, in acceptance, in thanks and gratitude and hope.

May it be so.

I invite you into a time of silence, for prayer or meditation.

Rev. Fran Dearman
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