

A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Robert R. Hansel on the Sunday of the Resurrection, Easter Day, April 24, 2011 at the Chapel of St. Mark in Port Royal, South Carolina.

### Easter Moments

Well, here we are at last. We've made our way through what seems like the endless journey of Lent and arrived at the Day of Alleluias. This is the special day that confirms our faith in the notion that death is not the final word, that life is much, much more than just the total of our days here on this earth. All over the world and throughout the centuries people of Faith join on Easter Sunday to celebrate resurrection, new life, reconciliation, peace, and joy. It's just a splendid time to be here with all of you in this wonderfully beautiful place, giving thanks and greeting one another in complete happiness.

And yet, not to throw cold water on all the celebration, we know that the world is not all joy and contentment. It's certainly good and appropriate for us to celebrate this morning, but open your newspaper or turn on your radio if you need any reminding that there's still an awful lot of chaos and disease all over the globe. But I don't want to focus on that reality so much as I want to say that we, as Easter People, continue to live in a Good Friday kind of world. Our legitimate joy and celebration has to take place in the context of a world still filled with too much hunger, violence, and need. That's the amazing thing about the victory of Easter: it establishes the Kingdom of God right here and now—even in the midst of so much that *still* needs healing and redeeming.

Too often, we look around at all the misery and suffering of the world and think to ourselves, surely God's victory of Easter is a fairly hollow victory at best. We wrongly assume that we can only experience the Kingdom of God once we've through with this life and have moved on to fly our way up to Heaven. That's not the case. You and I are living the Kingdom life this very moment. It's happening all around us. But, of course, the problem is that it has only begun; it's not complete; it's not fulfilled. So we don't always see it's signs and presence because they're clouded, masked by the louder and more dramatic noise of worldly events. I can easily understand how people might wonder, "Maybe Easter just didn't work out somehow."

A few years ago, in Memphis, we had as one of our Lenten speakers at Calvary Church Rabbi Kushner. The Rabbi is a great student of Hasidic stories—ancient Hebrew stories that are very simple in appearance but hold profound truths. He was telling about how this man came to see his Rabbi at Hanukkah and said, "I know that Hanukkah is a season in which we are supposed to be looking everywhere for the presence of God and to feel God's Spirit everywhere, surrounding us with love and blessings. But, Rabbi, I have to tell you this has not been a great year for me and my family. Everything is in disarray and my health is failing. God isn't present at all. We feel completely abandoned by God. I have the sense that God is so put off by the terrible things that are going on that he doesn't even want to see it. I think that he's hiding his face so he doesn't have to look. I really believe that God is hiding." So, the Rabbi replied, "Now wait a minute. Let's just think logically about what you just told me. YQU, can't be abandoned. If

you're really sure, that God is hiding, then obviously God is still around somewhere, now isn't he?"

The Rabbi's story makes me think of the game called "Peekaboo!" that adults play with little children. We put our hands in front of our face for just a moment and as soon as the child starts to get anxious, we take our hands away and watch the child instantly laugh and cheer as if we really had gone away and then returned. We didn't go anywhere at all. We're still right there, still the very same person, and the fact that for a moment we seemed hidden to this child doesn't mean a thing.

The great twentieth century theologian, Paul Tillich, once observed, "That which is ultimately true is seldom obvious." What he was pointing to is that reality has a way of being masked or covered over by all sorts of falsehood and distortions that are not easy to clear aside. It's very easy to be deceived by initial impressions and erroneous perceptions. Only those who consider carefully and completely will discern the elusive truth.

There are always circumstances in life that appear to challenge, contest, and even disprove God's presence and power. And yet, behind the mask of today's headlines, in the midst of even the most appalling suffering and turmoil, God face is "peeking out." And you and I can learn how to catch a glimpse of God peeking out. Those are moments when our hope is strengthened, our trust is deepened, and we find new energy to keep on following the path that leads to the Kingdom of God.

Let me give you an example that was told to me after a terrible storm with all sorts of property damage and power outages. At the local Quality Inn an exhausted and frazzled young woman at the registration desk was dealing with a long line of frustrated and unhappy people who were trying to secure a room. The motel was overbooked, everything in a mess. The phone was ringing non-stop. The woman was trying to be positive and congenial but this situation was out of hand and she had long since ceased to be having one of her better nights. In the middle of all the pushing and shoving, a couple rushed up to the front of the line and placed a small Styrofoam box on the counter in front of the reservation clerk. "It's banana cream," said the couple. What had happened was that they had been in this same line themselves for an hour sometime earlier and then had gone to get some dinner. They had asked this same desk clerk for the name of a nearby place to eat. She had told them that this particular restaurant was her personal favorite because that had the best banana cream pie she had ever tasted. So this couple, with no motive other than compassion and generosity had returned with the gift of a piece of pie—but not just a piece of pie; but the reality of love and goodness even in the midst of chaos. The clerk looked up at them with a face that shown with joy, and thanked them both. Her night was changed by the miracle of a piece of banana cream pie. She had experienced an Easter moment. God had "peeked through" for her.

When I think about "Easter Moments" I always think of our artist friend, Mimi Dann. She and her husband had taken a trip to Guatemala where they met and were very impressed by some primitive but wonderful wood carvings made by an old man whose name was, I think, Diego

Chavez. They visited Diego's shop and couldn't help noticing that he man had very few and terribly worn, old-fashioned tools. Mimi's husband wanted to help out and told the old man, "When I get back to the States I'm going to send you the best state-of-the-art wood carving set I can find." And he did. He purchased the tools and mailed them to Guatemala. That seemed to be the end of the story. Nobody knew what happened or whether Diego Chavez ever got that carving set. About 35 years later, Mimi's daughter and her husband were in Guatemala and they decided to try to find out whatever happened to that old man who carved beautiful things from wood. They went to the town and asked about Diego Chavez and they were guided to the shop. Out came this very young man and their first thought was, "This guy has to be some kind of miracle." But it turned out they were meeting Diego Chavez the THIRD! And the Grandson was also a woodcarver. He told them a story about how the old man had used the new tools to teach his son and many others to carve beautiful things of wood. Thirty-six years later, in a country thousands of miles away, there it was: God's face was peeking out from a set of woodworking tools.

There are hundreds and thousands of these sorts of Easter Moments and they happen day after day. They are little, fleeting, seemingly insignificant occurrences. But those moments are also wondrous signs and tokens that the promises of Easter are real and reliable. Everything is not perfect in this world but life has a way of pushing up to surface like Spring flowers through the snow of Winter. Resurrection is happening all around us, all the time, if we only have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Are YOU looking? Are YOU listening? I really hope so.

Happy Easter!