

Year B - Easter Day - 01 April 2018
John 20:1-18

What if I were to tell you that I was not going to preach today but rather sit down and allow the choir to proceed with their anthem and we could all go home early? If you were to believe me, I would call you all "April Fools". I imagine there are a number of sermons being preached this morning that have reference to the "other" day we are gathering on as well. However, I am not trying to be flippant. Today, as we gather to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we are also gathered on a day when tradition offers that we should be participating in something unbelievable as well. And so we are ...

Although there are no definitive statements about the creation of April Fools Day, there are many explanations of its incarnation. The one I want to mention is an article and cartoon from Harper's Weekly from 1908. Cartoonist Bertha R. McDonald wrote, "authorities gravely back [April Fools Day] to the time of Noah and the ark. The London Public Advertiser of March 13, 1769, printed: 'The mistake of Noah sending the dove out of the ark before the water had abated, on the first day of April, and to perpetuate the memory of this deliverance it was thought proper, whoever forgot so remarkable a circumstance, to punish them by sending them upon some sleeveless errand similar to that ineffectual message upon which the bird was sent by the patriarch.'"* There is, of course, absolutely no theological or scriptural basis to associate Noah with April Fools Day. However, there is something rather "foresight-ful" in Noah's eager anticipation. Indeed, there is something very Easter-like in his excitement.

Last evening, at the Easter Vigil, we listened to the story of Noah and the Ark and we did so in anticipation of what was to come. All of the readings at the Easter Vigil - the first celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ - lead us from creation to salvation, pointing the way that God had intended for all of His people from the beginning of time. Every step of the way we hear about how much God loves us, and the lengths to which He was willing to go to bring us into that hope which is realized in this very celebration of Easter.

We understand when reading the Flood Narrative, or Noah and the Ark, that Noah believed that something wonderful, life-saving, and indeed, life-changing was about to happen. In his faithfulness he had followed God's commands and was now waiting eagerly for the fulfillment of that promise God had given him and his family, and each of the animals on that ark. Noah was not a fool for sending out that dove too soon. He was not an April Fool. He was, rather, an Easter anticipator. He was looking with hope for something he believed but could not yet see.

In our Easter Gospel this morning, we have heard of another Easter Anticipator - Mary Magdalene. We are told, "Early on that first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb." Why was Mary there so early? What would possess a woman to go, unattended, in the dark of night, to a burial site? Was she there to mourn? Was she there because she felt she had no other place to be? Or could it be that some part of

her heart knew that something was waiting to happen? Could she have been there in anticipation of what might come next, even if she didn't realize consciously what she was doing?

Have you ever picked up the phone to call someone just to have him or her tell you that they were thinking about you right at that moment? Have you ever hesitated in doing something just to find out that your hesitation allowed you the chance to be present for something even better? Have you ever just "known" that something was about to happen? I imagine we have all had these moments. Some people call them lucky breaks or coincidences. Others speak of instinct, but we can speak with confidence that the Holy Spirit has been at work. When we listen to God whispering in our ears, amazing things can happen.

What if, on that ark, the Spirit has whispered to Noah, "Send the dove now, and simply trust"? In sending the dove, presumably too soon, Noah received an affirmation that God was in control but the right time had not yet come. Had the dove never come back, how would Noah have known with confidence that it was time to disembark? Maybe the dove just perished? Maybe it just didn't come back. However, God used that dove, returning with the news that the time was not quite right, to allow Noah to prepare for that time coming when it would be right. A lot would have to happen for Noah and his family, and indeed for all the animals, to be ready to disembark the ark - their old ways of life - to leap forward into their new life with hope and belief. In a way, the returning dove provided Noah with a bridge upon which to wait and prepare: a bridge between the end of the old life and the beginning of the new one.

Mary Magdalene's experience is really quite similar to that of Noah. She is not given the gift of simply moving from Point A - Jesus death upon the cross and burial in the tomb - to Point B - Jesus fully resurrected and standing obviously before her. I think that short a path from old life to new would have been too incomprehensible for her. She needed something that provided time for her to process what was really happening and help her make that huge transition to who she was with Jesus when he was just a man and who she would be with him when he was her resurrected Lord.

Mary is given the gift not of a moment in which all is revealed, but rather that of a journey that unfolds, as she is able to comprehend it. First she finds the tomb empty... Then she runs to fetch Simon Peter and the other disciple... Then she spent time weeping outside the empty tomb... Then the two angels spoke to her, allowing her to finally voice what she was feeling... It was only *after* she was able to articulate her deepest feelings that Jesus appeared to her, and even then she was unable to recognize the truth that what she most hoped for was right before her ...

Like Noah, Mary would not have been able to fully deal with the new life being prepared for her had she not had that time of waiting in between. That period between the tomb and the conversation with the gardener provided Mary with a bridge upon which to wait and prepare: a bridge between the end of the old life and the beginning of the new one. Once she had crossed that bridge, only then was she able to recognize that Jesus - her resurrected Lord and Saviour - was standing right

there waiting for her all the time. But first, like Noah, she had to summon up the courage of an April Fool to become an Easter Anticipator – anticipating that which the world said was foolish.

Each and every one of us, and so very many who have not yet understood the call of Jesus on their lives, are Easter Anticipators too. We stand in a place, wherever it may be, looking back on what once was in our lives, knowing that what was back there is not where we need to end up. And we look ahead to a world that we can't yet understand – maybe with joy and excitement, maybe with fear and anxiety of the unknown that is to come – or maybe with a healthy mix of both. We stand on this bridge that leads us from our yesterdays and toward our eternity and we trust, like Noah and like Mary, that although the world may call us April Fools, we will be found rejoicing in a world that is filled with love and hope, mercy and forgiveness, joy and peace, and greater still, Jesus Christ, risen and waiting for us to hear him say our names and accept his invitation to complete our walk across that bridge from Easter Anticipators to Easter Participants, forever and ever and ever ...

And so I say to all of you, may we all be April Fools if it means we all become Easter Fools as well!

* 1 McDonald, Bertha R. (7 March 1908). "The Oldest Custom in the World", *Harper's Weekly*. Vol. 52 no. 2672. P 26.