

March 24, 2008
Easter Sunday

Suttons Bay Congregational Church
The Rev. Robin Long

There is a reindeer windsock hanging from a hook in our back yard. The hook is buried in a pile of dirty snow I haven't gotten up the energy to climb the pile to take down the Christmas decoration.

There is a Valentine's Day wreath on our front door. I notice it everyday as I drive into our driveway after work but we use the back door and so by the time I drive around to the back of the house, get Nathan out of his car seat, and deal with the stampeding corgis that greet us every time we come home, I forget about taking down the wooden heart wreath on the front door.

There are St. Patrick's Day socks in the pile of dirty clothes in the laundry room. There are also green frosted shamrock cookies in the fridge and St. Patrick's Day cards from loved ones far away displayed on the kitchen counter that are now sharing space with the Easter cards from those same loved ones. (In fact, two cards for different holidays came in the same package. The Longs are nothing if not frugal.)

And there are plastic eggs hanging from the miniature Christmas tree that is still in Nathan's play room. We were going to hang the eggs on one of the trees in the front yard but the day we were going to do it the wind chill was minus nine so we just took the Valentine's hearts off the Christmas tree and replaced them with eggs.

Perhaps I'm lazy, but I don't think that's it, at least not in these circumstances. Rather, I'm frustrated with the rapid passing of time, which has only been exasperated by the earliness of Easter this year. Here it is Easter and in my spirit, I'm still not done with the Christmas windsock in the backyard. Many of you have probably received the emails explaining why Easter is so early this year--that Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox and that this dating of Easter is based on the lunar calendar that Hebrew people used to identify Passover. And while all of this may make perfect sense in terms of the moon and its equinox and the sacred schedules of our Jewish brothers and sisters, it makes no sense at all to me in the sacred rhythms of my life—a life that seems to be passing all too quickly, even as the days are supposedly growing ever longer with the early application of Day Light Savings Time.

Now what's most disturbing to me about all of this is what I think most of you are sitting there thinking even as I'm speaking—"Oh Robin, Honey, if you think times flies now just wait till you get older." And if this is true, I'm having a big garage sale this summer and selling all of my holiday decorations which, instead of adding to the joy of the seasons, seem lately to have become a source of mocking, unwelcome reminders of just how fleeting time is.

And as I turn, reaching for those fleeting times that have passed, I find myself turning my back to the empty tomb. I'm not ready for this—not yet. This is too big, too grand, too wonderful—and I want to be ready. I don't want to meet this morning with my back turned, my arms reaching haplessly towards the past. I want to face the empty tomb with open arms, ready to embrace my risen savior. It's not that I don't want Easter this year, it's just that I don't want it this early, I don't want it until I'm ready for it—and I'm not ready.

There was another such occasion in this life—a big, grand, wonderful occasion that, though I had been anticipating it for most of my life—I wasn't ready for it when it came. I was just about to begin my final year of seminary. Corey had been in Tibet for most of the summer and when he returned to the states, he drove from Boston to Ohio to see me. We went to Ann Arbor to peruse the used book shops and enjoy the ethnic food. We were in an Italian restaurant for dinner, the lights were dim, the mood romantic. We finished our entrees. Corey said he brought me gifts from his trip. He pulled a beautiful silk scarf out of the camera bag he'd been carrying. Then he said he had something else for me. I could tell from the look in his eyes that it was not a snow globe with little tiny Buddhist monks praying in miniature Tibetan temples. I was suddenly overwhelmed with anxiety. I wasn't ready for this. I asked, "Is it a present that comes in a little box but has huge consequences? Because if it is, I'm not ready for that. Not right now." Looking perplexed he asked, "What do you mean "not right now"—like "not right now" not right here and right now in this restaurant or "not right now" like not this weekend or "not right now" like not this summer or "not right now" like not in this lifetime. I assured him that it was "not right now" as in not right here at this restaurant in this moment with all of these people around. A few hours later I suggested that the right "right now" was now, and all's well that ends well except that we have don't have the kind of engagement story you want to tell your grandchildren. And it wasn't that I didn't love Corey, and it wasn't that I hadn't anxiously been waiting for him to come home from Asia because I thought we might get engaged when he did, and it wasn't that I didn't want to be married to him and it wasn't anything really except that I wasn't ready right then.

And I'm not ready right now, either. If Easter were to wait until I'm ready for it this year well then, we might be hunting for pastel colored eggs in the piles of autumn leaves come next September. I'm not ready for this empty tomb, this risen savior, and I certainly wasn't ready for the cross on Friday or the Last Supper on Thursday or even the Palm Processional last Sunday. And yet, here we are—the palms were waved, the Last Supper's been served, the cross did its bloody deed, and now it's empty, and so is the tomb. It's happened, and it's happening, right now.

And is more often the case than not, God's right now is not the right "right now" for us. We've all lived through our share of the wrong "right nows." Those times when right now was not a good time to lose a job. Those times when right now was a very wrong time to fail a class.

Those times when right now came way too soon as we watched our loved one die. Those times when right now wouldn't come fast enough as we awaited news of a diagnosis. So many times in life, the "right now" just seems so terribly not right.

But the miracle of Easter isn't just this moment, not just this right now—but rather the miracle is that this "right now", this right now in which love and life triumph over all, is eternal. It doesn't matter how fast the days of this earthly life are flying by because this "right now" lasts a lifetime and beyond. This "right now" begins right here—at a baptismal font—where we promise that our children will grow up knowing that God loves them during every "right now", and seemingly "wrong now" of their lives. This story continues right here—in this sanctuary—where the spirit is present with us in every "right now" for we have been promised that where two or three are gathered, there will God be as well. This story continues right here—in you and in me who have been called to live every "right now" as beloved children of God saved by the grace of Jesus Christ who is "right now" here among us, on this Easter Sunday—our risen savior.

And it doesn't matter if we are ready, it doesn't matter what the calendar says or what phase the moon is in, or what time the sun rose this morning, because Jesus was and is ready. On that first Easter Sunday, Jesus was ready to overcome the shackles of death to arise to new life. He was so ready that he came bursting forth out of the tomb, out of the places of death and shadows, out of places of confusion and depression, out of places of illness and mourning, out of places of self-hatred and loathing. He burst forth out of those places, a body coming out of the grave, every cell in him springing to life so that every one of our "right nows" might be the right "right now" in which Christ pulls us from those places of shadows and sin and brings us to new and eternal life. Moments in which the risen Christ grabs hold of our shoulders and turns us—turns us away from our what-ifs and only-ifs and I wonder-ifs. Turns us to him, to the "right now" and in his eyes we see love and mercy and acceptance and because of this day, because of this "first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox", because of this Easter Sunday, we know that Christ's love and mercy and acceptance will be with us right now and for a lifetime and eternity of "right nows." Thanks be to God that this "right now is the right "right now" of love and life that lasts for all time. Thanks be to God "right now."