

Hollow Easter Bunnies

John 20:1-18 (English Standard
Version)

Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston,
WV Easter Sunday (April 8 , 2012)

^{20:1} Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the **stone had been taken away from the tomb.** ² She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him." ³ Peter and the other disciple left to go to the tomb. ⁴ They were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. ⁵ Bending down to take a look, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he didn't go in. ⁶ Following him, Simon Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. ⁷ He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head. It wasn't with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place. ⁸ Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ They didn't yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.

¹¹ Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb. ¹² She saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. ¹³ The angels asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

She replied, "They have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put him." ¹⁴ As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn't know it was Jesus.

¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabbouni" (which means *Teacher*).

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Don't hold on to me, for I haven't yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, 'I'm going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, "I've seen the Lord." Then she told them what he said to her.

My, my, my! Just look at you. How well you cleaned up!

At 5:00 this morning I have never heard the choir of birds sing so well. They knew!

Yep. Easter is here. It come with **Spring** and the **greening of the earth** and the **colorful blossoms**. Christ is risen and the whole world comes to life.

Sap rises in the dormant trees; birds are building their nests. The **dogwoods are exploding**. Even the **highlighter in my iPad Word Processor is the shape of an Easter Egg** this morning! And the **trumpet lilies spill their powerful aroma** into the air (we have moved them

down away from the choir, however, because there are some in the choir who are subject to fainting from their powerful fragrance.)

But, you know – I’ve got a beef about this season. It’s the HOLLOW EASTER BUNNY BEEF.

Maybe, I’m just an old timer, who is still a purist, who thinks

- that solid wood is better than veneer,
- that plastic shoes are not as good as leather ones, and
- that Easter bunnies should be SOLID CHOCOLATE (either solid white chocolate or filled with maple nougat are my two choices) but certainly NOT HOLLOW.

You know they do it, to **make them look bigger**, to **charge more**, and to **have less chocolate in them**.

I know. I know. That’s not what they tell you. The “official” line from the **hollow chocolate bunny cartel** is this, ***“The solid chocolate rabbits are too hard to bite***

and chew through. The hollow chocolate bunnies are much easier to bite into and to enjoy.”

That’s what they say.

Cheaper. Easier to bite into. Easier to enjoy.

I wonder – **HAS EASTER BECOME** like the **HOLLOW EASTER BUNNY?**

I remember the story of the little girl watching the made for television movie about Jesus during Holy Week and Easter. After the crucifixion she shrieked WITH DELIGHT, **“Oh boy, here comes the good part!”**

Soren Kierkegaard once said, **“When our faith loses its ability to shock us, it loses its power.”**

The stone is gone! So what? We know how this whole thing ends.

Easter has **become so routine** that **we fail to be amazed**. We celebrate

- the resurrection of Jesus,
- the popping out of spring,

- the gathering of family,
- the excuse to put on the spring clothes (I remember when it used to be the dividing line, when women were allowed to wear white shoes today for the first time).

It's all become one. It's all the same.

It's like a **HOLLOW EASTER BUNNY**.

⌘ Make it **easy**.

⌘ Make it **predictable**.

⌘ Please **don't allow it to be too long**.

⌘ Make it **pretty**.

As I was shining shoes on the sidewalk, a few blocks down from the Church, on Maundy Thursday, one woman stopped to get her shoes shined and to talk.

She was so excited. She said that this Sunday was going to be the first Sunday in their new church. They had worked for so hard for this day to arrive.

She told me that many of her friends didn't understand her faith. She summarized a long litany of sorrow and tragedy that had come into her life. She said that none of it had ever gotten her down, because her **faith was solid**. She said she had several friends who seemed to love Jesus, but as soon as some trouble came into their lives, they dumped Jesus like yesterday's newspaper. It seems, she said, like their only question was, "What have you done for me lately?"

As she described her life, her sorrow, and her faith, and compared it to others, it occurred to me that she was talking about **SOLID CHOCOLATE EASTER BUNNIES** and **HOLLOW EASTER BUNNIES**.

[Here I pull out the bright shiny **HOLLOW CHOCOLATE EASTER BUNNY** and put weights on it, until it crumbles and falls apart.]

Mary began the day, in today's Gospel, wanting to hold on to the good ol' days – like many of us get to the

point in life when we want to, as well. She had so many "if only"s. But life doesn't work that way:

If only Jesus had not been so daggone holy

If only the money had come through
sooner ... in time

If only we could have just stayed out of Jerusalem and just
healed and fed people

If only we could go back to how it was

before the children grew and flew the nest

If only Jesus hadn't made such a big splash with that Palm
Parade

If only we had not been
stabbed in the back by our friend.

If only Jesus hadn't done that thing with the money
changers in the temple

If only we could go back to how it was
when we were healthy.

If only Jesus hadn't disagreed with the powerful people

If only we had been dealt a better hand in life

If only Judas had not

If only we had followed that dream from our youth.

If only Pilate had just

If only someone had found the cure for ...

If only God had come down and saved Jesus on the cross

If only we could go back to how it was when we were
healthy.

The **HOLLOW ESTER BUNNY** won't take the load.

The *“let’s reduce Easter to a feel, good, easy to digest, spring nature celebration”* that we **can understand**, that we can control -- won’t carry the load either.

- ⊕ Before the Resurrection, there was the crucifixion.
- ⊕ Before the Resurrection, there were the lonely nights of emptiness, of crying, of disillusionment,
- ⊕ The Resurrection that doesn’t truly amaze us won’t be powerful enough to carry us through the hard times.
- ⊕ The faith that is strong enough to carry us is solid, not hollow. **[put all the weights and more on the solid chocolate rabbit.]**

If we – thee and me –

- ⊕ Have it **all together**
- ⊕ Have **all the answers**
- ⊕ Have **all that we need and most of what we want**

‡ Have **come to rely upon just ourselves**

Then *we probably don't know how much* we **need** the **Power of Easter** – a Power that we cannot explain, and that we cannot control.

But – as much as we surround ourselves with **HOLLOW EASTER BUNNIES** – the **DAY WILL COME** when we will finally realize that they will not do the job.

The **good news** is that **God loves us so much** – **RESURRECTION** is **still available** to us – **if we will but allow it**.

The **Resurrection was a wonderful thing** indeed, but a **SAD THING** if we **only treat it like an historic event** that happened almost a couple thousand years ago.

A Nazarene pastor friend of mine told me about a couple named Ed and Rosie. They had been married

for 60 years and attended church together. They had their spot--their pew.

Then Rosie died and for months Ed couldn't bring himself to attend church anymore. His faith, it seemed, had been a **HOLLOW EASTER BUNNY**. But, finally, on Easter Sunday he came back to church .

After a stirring resurrection worship Ed stood up and shouted "Rosie Lives!" Then he began to sing the song "*My Wild Irish Rose.*"

The congregation joined in this unplanned, unconventional way of affirming the resurrection of Jesus. Because Jesus Lives, Rosie lives, and so does everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ.

The power of Easter is still available to us – granting us power and relief for when all the **HOLLOW EASTER BUNNIES** of life let us down. We **need to be careful to not rely** upon those things **for so long** that we **mistakenly believe** that **they are the real thing**.

Jesus wins. And so do we.

Christ is risen! Risen indeed. Alleluia!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the
Holy Spirit.