

Second Sunday in Easter  
April 19, 2020  
The Rev. Jedediah D. Holdorph  
Trinity Episcopal Church, Bend

Acts 1:14a, 22-32  
Psalm 16  
1 Peter 1:3-9  
John 20:19-31

*Church closed due to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic: livestream available on Facebook and YouTube.*

There is a story I've often told on this, the Second Sunday of Easter. It's a story I first heard long ago, before I went off to seminary, also told on this Sunday of the church year. I shared it in every congregation I've been privileged to serve – once in Albuquerque, three times in Lexington, Missouri, twice in Libertyville, Illinois and twice in Medford. I've told it once before here at Trinity, back in 2015.

Many of you will remember how L'eggs pantyhose used to come in one of these plastic eggs. That's how old this story is; it must go back to the 1970s.



It's a story told and retold so often that it's hard to know what really happened. But whether or not it actually happened exactly this way, it's one of those stories that rings true. It's called "Philip's Egg." And it was first told, so far as I've been able to tell, by Harry Pritchett, Jr. <sup>i</sup>

Once upon a time I had a young friend named Philip. Philip lived in a nearby city, and Philip was born with Downs Syndrome. He was a pleasant child — happy, it seemed — but increasingly aware of the difference between himself and other children.

Philip went to Sunday school. And his teacher, also, was a friend of mine. My teacher friend taught the third-grade class at the Methodist Church. Philip was in his class, along with nine other eight-year-old boys and girls.

Most of you know eight-year-olds. And Philip, with his differences, was not readily accepted as a member of his third-grade Sunday school class. But my friend is a creative Sunday school teacher, and he helped to facilitate a good group of eight-year-old children. They learned, and they laughed, and they played together.

And they really cared about one another, even though eight-year-olds don't often say out loud that they care about one another out loud. But my teacher friend could see it. He knew it.

He also knew that Philip was not really a part of that group.

Philip, of course, did not choose nor did he want to be different. He just was. And that was just the way things were.

My Sunday school teacher friend had a marvelous idea for his class the Sunday after Easter last year. You know those things that pantyhose come in — the containers that look like great big eggs — my friend had collected ten of these to use on that Sunday. The children loved it when he brought them into the room.

Each child was to get a great big egg. It was a beautiful spring day, and the assigned task was for each child to go outside on the church grounds and to find a symbol for new life, put it into the egg, and bring it back to the classroom. They would then open and share their new life symbols and surprises together one by one.

Well, they did this, and it was glorious. And it was confusing. And it was wild. They ran all around the church grounds, gathered their symbols, and returned to the classroom.

They put all the eggs on a table, and all the children stood around the table. Then the teacher began to open them.

He opened one, and there was a flower, and they “ooh-ed” and “aah-ed.”

He opened another, and there was a little butterfly. "Beautiful!" the girls all said (since it is hard for eight-year-old boys to say "beautiful").

He opened another, and there was a rock. And as third graders will, some laughed, and some said, "That's crazy! How's a rock supposed to be like new life?"

But the smart little boy whose egg they were speaking of spoke up. He said, "That's mine. And I knew all of you would get flowers and buds and leaves and butterflies and stuff like that. So I got a rock because I wanted to be different. And for me, that's new life." They all laughed. My teacher friend said something to himself about the profundity of eight-year-olds.

And then the resumed the sharing, and the teacher opened another egg surprise.

But when he opened the next one, there was nothing there. The other children, as eight-year-olds will, said, "That's not fair! That's stupid! Somebody didn't do right."

Then my teacher friend felt a tug on his shirt, and he looked down. Philip was standing beside him. "It's mine," Philip said. "It's mine."

And the children said, "You don't ever do things right, Philip. There's nothing there!"

"I did so do it," Philip said. "I did do it. It's empty. The tomb is empty!"

There was silence, a very full silence.

And for you people who don't believe in miracles, I want to tell you that one happened that day last spring. From that time on, it was different. Philip suddenly became a part of that group of eight-year-old children. They took him in. He was set free from the tomb of his differentness.

Philip died the following summer. His family had known since the time he was born that he wouldn't live out a full life span. Many other things had been wrong with his tiny body. And so, late last July, with an infection that most normal children could have quickly shrugged off, Philip died. The Mystery simply enveloped him.

He was buried from that church. And on that day at the funeral, nine eight-year-old children marched up to the altar, not with flowers to cover over the stark reality of death. Nine eight-year-olds, with their Sunday school teacher, marched right up to that altar, and laid on it an empty egg — an empty, old, discarded pantyhose egg.

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<sup>i</sup> A version of the story is @ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/1985/summer/8513113.html>. I've adapted it slightly, in most cases to match the details in the print copy I first used (and in some cases, to help tell as a story).