

## “Carrots, Eggs, and Coffee Beans”

Mark 16:1-8

(The tomb is empty, but that’s not the end of the story. . .)

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Who put out carrots last night for the Easter Bunny?

Who has more-than-the-usual number of eggs in your refrigerator, some of which are a pastel color?

We celebrate Easter, in our playfully symbolic and folksy ways with carrots and eggs. Oh, yes, and with coffee beans.

“Coffee beans?” you are probably thinking, “Pastor Carolyn is a little mixed up. Maybe coffee goes with St. Patrick’s Day, or coffee *cake* with Easter morning brunch, but coffee beans and Easter? That is not a match.”

Though Coffee Beans are *not* part of our folk celebration at Easter time, coffee beans **do** have a connection with carrots and eggs. I’ll explain.

There’s a fable told in numerous cultures that goes by the name of today’s sermon, “Carrots, Eggs, and Coffee Beans.” I heard the fable at the Baccalaureate Worship for our daughter’s college graduation.<sup>1</sup> When I heard the story, I wrote in the margins of the program: “Idea for Easter sermon some day . . .”

I boldly titled this sermon a couple months ago, and then as Easter drew nearer, I got nervous. Would I be able to locate the original story? Perhaps I should call the University and ask for a copy of the past Baccalaureate sermon. Just in case, I checked the Internet first. I typed in “Carrots, Eggs, and Coffee Beans,” thinking I would receive that familiar page “No matches found for your search.” Instead, there were way more than 150 reference sites! I got nervous again. Now I was afraid every one of you already knew this story! The tale appeared in Christian, Hindu, and Jewish newsletters and even the web sites of medical products and motivational speakers. Usually someone introduces the story by saying, “I heard this somewhere.”

Here is the story.

One day a young woman came to her mother to tell her life had become unbearable. As soon as she solved one problem, another came her way. She was tired of struggling. Her mother (in some renditions, this is a father) led her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water and placed each on a hot fire. Soon the water in all three pots came to a boil. In the first, the mother placed two carrots, in the second, two raw eggs, and in the third, some ground coffee beans. All the while, the mother continued to listen to her daughter’s concerns.

Twenty minutes later the mother turned off the burners. She fished out the carrots and eggs and placed them on a plate. Then she ladled the coffee into a cup.

The mother asked her daughter to feel the carrots. The carrots had been sturdy when they were placed into the pot, but now they were soft, mushy. The mother asked her daughter to break open one of the eggs. The fluid inside the eggshell had become hard. Finally, the mother asked the daughter to sip the coffee. The daughter enjoyed the rich aroma and tasted the liquid with pleasure. Since this is a fable, the daughter asks, “What does this mean, Mother?”

The mother explained that each of the objects had faced the same adversity—they were each in boiling water the same length of time. However, each had *reacted* differently. The carrots began strong, solid, but they became soft and mushy. The eggs had been fragile, but became hardened. Both the carrots and the eggs *had themselves changed* in the hot water. The coffee beans, however, *changed the water*!

Every one of the hundreds of web sites presented a consistent moral to this story: *When faced with adversity, how do you respond? Ask yourself: "Am I like the carrot that, with adversity, loses strength and becomes mushy?" "Am I like the egg, becoming rigid with a hardened heart?" Or, "Am I like the coffee beans—changing the environment to make it not only bearable, but delicious?"*<sup>2</sup>

Eleanor Roosevelt was much briefer—she spoke of women, but we could say everyone is “like teabags. They never know how strong they are until they get into hot water. . .”

This story is not intended as an Easter story. It is a motivational, culturally diverse tale **that encourages us not to harden or break down too much in the midst of struggles, rather, to stay true to ourselves and to positively affect situations.**

Nevertheless, not only because it includes carrots and eggs, but also for more important reasons, this is a fitting story to consider on Easter!

We heard today the Easter events as told in the Gospel of Mark. Just as the four gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tell a somewhat different version of Jesus' birth, so do the four writers give Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection slightly different narratives.

Mark's Gospel—the one we read today—ends abruptly. Did you notice? It ends with “So they went out and fled from the tomb . . . and they said nothing to anyone. . .” This is not only the end to Mark's Easter story; it is **the end** of the whole Gospel of Mark.

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome are bringing spices to the tomb where they had just the day before seen Jesus' body laid. Yesterday they had watched a heavy stone placed over the tomb, so on their way there early this morning, they ask one another whom they might be able to find to help them move away that heavy stone so they could go inside. When they get to the tomb, they are surprised. They do not need any help at all. The stone is already rolled back. (Remember these ancient tombs are big—you go in and walk around in them; they are not like burial plots we use today.)

The women walked into the tomb and are surprised again. Instead of seeing Jesus' body, they see an “angelic being.” I know Mark calls the being a “young man dressed in a white robe,” but scholars agree it was what they call an “angelophany”! That is a funny word—“angelophany,” meaning the appearance of an angel. The being in white tells them that Jesus is no longer there, but he tells the women to go tell the disciples to catch up with Jesus at Galilee, because this angel happens to know that is where Jesus is headed. “Tell especially Peter,” the angel calls after them . . .

In this Gospel, the women are depicted as fleeing from the tomb and I quote, “they say nothing to anyone.” That is the final scene. That's it. That's **the end** of the Gospel of Mark. Notice, there is no report of anyone actually seeing the Risen Lord.

John and I go to plenty of movies where I do not like the ending. Most of the time I leave it at that—I just don't like the ending. However, when I like the *movie* enough

that it bothers me not to like the ending, I sometimes give the movie a different ending in my mind, just for my own satisfaction.

That is exactly what people did with this abrupt ending in the Gospel of Mark. Over the years, hearers and readers of Mark did not like the story ending there. They wanted Jesus to actually appear to disciples.

This may surprise you, but in our Bibles, there are in fact three different endings to this gospel! There is the shortest version, the ending we heard—with the women running off and remaining silent. A second ending adds a very brief explanation that Jesus himself proclaims salvation across the land, from east to west. A third ending is much longer, adding many specifics.

**The first original ending let the reader *anticipate future events*. We have to *imagine the disciples catching up with Jesus*. I like this ending, because it leaves Easter open to the future—**

Think hard about this fact: The Gospel of Mark was written. We do not have to be detectives to realize that the women must not have remained silent. They must have told others, for billions of people now know: **Christ is Risen!**

I don't know how you'll take this, but I think we could say that the story of the carrots, the eggs, and the coffee beans tells us a lot about Jesus the Christ.

The Risen Christ is a lot like the coffee beans!

Jesus suffered, but throughout his life, his vision for humanity remained undaunted. Jesus *radically changed others* for the good.

Shortly after someone dies is a confusing time. Loved ones experience dreams, angelophanies—all sorts of unique events—because they are highly vulnerable to the multi-dimensions of spiritual life. Occasionally the people around the loved one who died themselves *take up the cause or the vision of the leader*. This was certainly the case with Jesus. Perhaps even more significant than Jesus' being resurrected is the fact that the **Jesus community was resurrected!**

Jesus would not be remembered today UNLESS those in Jesus' environment *had been transformed*. **Like the coffee beans, Jesus transformed his environment, so strongly that even we are affected today!**

I don't agree completely with the moral told in all those web sites about the carrots, the eggs, and the coffee beans. First, I like cooked carrots and hard-boiled eggs. They are even both healthy—a lot better than coffee! Also, we humans *do* go through periods of mushiness when we struggle, and that is natural. Sometimes our hearts harden when we go through pain or difficulties. Yet, the “REALLY BIG STORY” from this tale is the brewing of the coffee—the transformation of the water, the very environment in which the struggle took place. Christ “brought good things to life” through a *transforming love*, God's love. AND THAT LOVE IS STILL BREWING, STILL FLAVORING OUR EXISTENCE, EVEN AMIDST OUR STRUGGLES TODAY.

Alfred North Whitehead was a serious mathematician and philosopher of the last century. He would be one of the last persons I would think of who would be interested in Superman. Nevertheless, Whitehead was intrigued with the *notion* of Clark Kent's transformation in the telephone booth. (I've asked around, but have not found anyone who knows where Clark Kent goes to change into Superman in this post-telephone booth era.)

Philosopher Whitehead believed strongly that God helps us to undergo changes, transformations, for good, both as individuals and as a society. You could say he believed in miracles, radical breakthroughs of the Spirit. Once, in a poetic way, this serious philosopher admitted that when he passed a phone booth, [lean, as if on a phone booth] he fingered his tie.<sup>3</sup> That is, he fantasized being Clark Kent getting ready to be transformed. “What if?” he thought.

*We don't have many phone booths anymore, but we do have Easter!* We are still in the environment of Jesus who, like the coffee beans, transforms what's around him. Easter reminds us that we can not only make it through any struggle, we can transform the situation for good.

In the *original* ending of the Gospel of Mark we do not see the resurrected Jesus—he appears off stage—in the future. *You and I become the living authors of the ending of the story of Mark.*

Let's get ready to lean against some imaginary phone booths! Think of transformations for your surroundings that you want to help to happen. As Easter people, we are already *empowered* to make a difference. [Leave.]

[Come back after a few steps.] That ending was so abrupt. I thought of a second ending.

Think of a transformation you *want for yourself today.* Think of an “angelophany” if you want. Think of Clark Kent, if that's enticing for you. Think BIG! Because, Christ is Risen! Born out of the hot water of *his* times, the greatest flavor of *all* times is still brewing for you. Amen! [Leave again.]

[Go further, but come back again.] Just like those who wanted even more from the Gospel of Mark, I thought of a third ending, a “long” one. No. I have no more words. WE write the long ending ourselves—we *are the authors of the future of the Risen Christ.*

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Uma Saini, “From One to Many and From Many to One,” Cornell 2005 Baccalaureate Service, May 29, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> II Cor. 4:8-9 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed

<sup>3</sup> Whitehead, Alfred North, “Apprehension” in *Process Studies*, V13, N1 (Spring, 1983).