**Act V: Transformation**

**“Easter Fools!”**

A sermon by The Rev. Christopher Wendell

For Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church

Bedford, MA

I have a question to get us started today…and it’s a question that might be easier to answer if you are a child or even a teenager. And, if you happened to attend a performance of the Suessical last month at Bedford High School, you have a little advantage. If you happen to be named Ben Woodward, you’re really likely to know the answer. Here’s the question: Who, is the biggest plain fool in the jungle of Nool?

That’s right, it’s Horton the elephant. And why does everyone think Horton is a fool? Because he goes around talking to a speck of dust on a clover. That’s a pretty weird way to spend your time. You could understand why everyone called him a fool. Except of course, that down on that speck of dust, Horton knew that something was alive. No one else could see it, so they all thought he was crazy. He tried and he tried and he tried to tell others about this amazing thing that was alive and, in fact, right in front of them, but they just wouldn’t believe him. And they said he was a fool. They taunted him and teased him, and generally made his life pretty unpleasant. Especially that sour Kangaroo. But he stuck with it.

In fact, he doubled down on his foolishness. And started taking care of an egg that his bird friend didn’t want to sit on anymore. Again, the whole jungle called him foolish (an Elephant sitting on an egg?) but just like the dust speck, he knew there was something alive in there that needed him to take care of it. And so he sat on his egg and talked to his dust, wondering how long he would have to sit there and whether anyone else would ever come to see the wisdom in his foolishness.

All week long, we’ve been exploring how the themes of Holy Week and Easter offer us pathways into God’s gift of spiritual freedom. From Protest to Intimacy to Surrender to Remembering, each invitation draws us nearer and nearer to lives of true freedom. Today we arrive at Act V of our story, where we discover the final pathway into spiritual freedom, which is Transformation. The transformation we celebrate today is twofold. It is, of course, a celebration of Jesus’ own transformation – from death to new life in the glory of his resurrection. But it is also a celebration of how his transformation enables our own. How, because of Easter, we are no longer a people whose lives look *to* the Cross, but now a people whose lives look *through* the Cross to our own risen life.

On Easter, we affirm that God’s love never ends. If you like arcade games, it’s like wack-a-mole, when it gets pushed down in one place it pops back up in another. If you like poetry, it’s like the words of the Greek poet who writes, “You tried to bury us; but you didn’t realize that we were seeds.” No matter how bleak the outlook, how destructive our human tendencies, how strong the forces of oppression may be, nothing can extinguish the incarnate presence of God’s love from the earth. Not even death on a Cross. Somehow God finds a way to rise up. To return to those he loves. That is, to you. Whoever you are, wherever you’re from, whatever you’ve done, and however you pray, nothing can stop God’s love for you. It persists forever, and this is truly good news.

It’s good news because it offers us who are God’s beloved, the truest and deepest kind of freedom. It’s not the freedom from loss, or pain, or suffering. It’s not freedom from the random accidents of life nor the brokenness of humanity. Those things are still part of life, even on Easter. Rather, it’s the freedom to know that God’s Love always wins. It’s the freedom to trust that what we experience as loss can still accomplish God’s purposes. It’s the freedom to accept that just like Jesus, just like the earth we have been given, just like all of creation, our lives are marked by ongoing cycles of dying and rising. And so, whether we are dying or rising on any given day, or week, or month or even year…we need not be afraid.

This is what it means to be an Easter people, which is at the core of our Christian joy. It doesn’t mean smiling all the time, though of course you can. It doesn’t mean the tears won’t come, because of course they will. It means that our confidence in God’s love for us and for the whole world is stronger than our fear of death. And it is so important, because living with an acceptance that we are creature who die and rise, again and again, is what enables us to be transformed so that more and more, we can live like Jesus.

The writer and scholar Marcus Borg writes in his book, The Heart of Christianity, that the Risen Life to which Christians are called is “both rhapsodic and realistic”. It’s rhapsodic because the freedom offered by a life of ongoing dying and rising is so deeply compelling. It offers a transformative pathway not just into our own redemption, but the redemption of all that is broken within our human family and all of creation. The Easter miracle of Christ’s rising, affirms the worthiness of our own deepest longings to rise and become the beloved community that we dream of.

But the Risen Life to which we are called is also realistic. The rising we yearn for won’t happen without the dying we so often fear. So many of us long to be free from parts of ourselves or parts of our circumstances that confine us in some way, that hold us back from embodying God’s love and embedding it in the world around us more fully. But we cling to them anyway, or they cling to us, and hold us back. They keep us from standing arm in arm in the streets with sisters and brothers who are suffering. They keep us from saying the things that need to be said to those we love the most, even if they’re hard to say and hear. They keep us fixated on the grand plans we have for our lives, rather than the daily purposes God offers us. In short, they keep us from doing things that we know are right, but that we worry are foolish, because the world tells us that they will be a waste of our time, won’t change anything, and may even get us in trouble. Our fears of being foolish keep us from the deepest joys of Risen Life.

Luckily, today isn’t just Easter Sunday. It’s also April Fools Day. This doesn’t happen very often, but it’s a great mash-up. Basically, it’s Easter Fools Day. This does NOT mean that you should go around playing tricks on people. But it does mean, that in the light of Easter, in the light of the promise that God’s love is ever-present no matter what, we should have the confidence and the freedom to do the things that the world says are foolish, but that God knows are right. Perhaps that means sitting on other people’s eggs, even when they’ve given up on them. Perhaps it means speaking up for those who just can’t be heard because their voices are too small and other people’s lives are too loud. Perhaps it means admitting you are at fault, rather than insisting you did nothing wrong. Perhaps it means joining the Peace Corps. Perhaps it means telling your friends that you go to church…and like it (I hope!). Perhaps it means risking your job to call out workplace harassment. Or going vegan. Or joining the military. Or becoming a foster parent. Or being true to your gender expression. Or giving away too much money. Or singing, all the time out loud, too loud. Or…you fill in the blank. There are so many ways to be a fool for Christ!

We may look like serious people today, in our nice church cloths and fancy bonnets. But, God knows, in reality we are Easter Fools, wandering through our own jungles, dodging our own sour Kangaroos, and carrying around with us the Risen Life of Christ to show everyone whom we meet. And the more foolish we are, the more free we become. Free to live without fear. Free to speak, act, and live God’s love out loud. Free to be foolish enough to believe that our faith and our hope and our love for Christ, can and will transform the world. Alleluia Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia!