

*Easter Sunday*  
*Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

*April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007*

*Episcopal Church of Our Saviour*  
*Mill Valley, California*

*God Out of the Box*  
*by The Rev. Richard E. Helmer, Rector*

Hiroko, Daniel, and I decided to go to Stinson Beach a few weeks ago to get away from it all. It was Hiroko suggested that we try flying our kites – something we hadn't done literally in years, and certainly not since Daniel had been born. So I grumped around the apartment trying to find them. Hiroko, of course, knew where they were and pointed me in the right direction, and we headed to the beach on a partly cloudy day. There was no wind. But we had fun, anyway, impersonating Charlie Brown running with his kite, and Daniel dug in deep to the sand near the ocean's edge while the sandpipers ran back and forth in the surf. It was a great scene, rollicking at the water's edge with kites that would not fly, laughing out loud while our three-and-a-half year old began to cover himself in the wet sand.

Kites are the first image I'd like to use today for the Resurrection. Because we began with a problem and ended with a mystery. If you've ever had a kite, you've had to deal with tangled kite string. And unwrapping an old box kite I've had since before my high school days was a proof in point. Kites never quite pack properly, you see. They seem destined somehow to fly – to leave the box, even an inanimate as they are. A spar pokes out here. The kite string leaves the spool and turns into a knotted mess over there. After having searched so hard for the kites, I'd thought I'd be irritated untangling kite string. But on the beach with the smell of sea salt and the sand beneath our feet – well, many things become possible!

Here's another image for Resurrection – yes it's the butterfly on the cover of our Easter Worship bulletins today. Take a look. Frankly, up until now, I found the butterfly not so helpful as an image to describe the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We can biologically study the development of the butterfly from egg to caterpillar to pupa to its colorful stage with gossamer wings. We can explain the processes that govern a creature that really never dies but, of course, changes radically. But what captured Resurrection for me as I reflected on the butterfly this Easter was the newly-winged insect emerging from the pupa. If you've ever seen it happen on video, you know what I mean. The butterfly just doesn't fit into the chrysalis anymore. It must break free. And as its wings first fill with the fluids of life, it is clear it can't fit anymore into the old way of being. Somehow, that says something about Resurrection – the Risen Christ cannot fit anymore into the old way of being.

Back at home, Resurrection is about Daniel trying, in his three-year-old way trying to dress himself. With arms sticking out in all directions – elbows, fingers, fore-arms, knotted wrists – trying to poke his head through the right part of the shirt. Funny, the shirt should fit him, but he can find many ways not to fit into it. That's life in the Resurrection.

What is God up to?

Each year, we gather on Easter Sunday to celebrate something that doesn't quite fit, and yet it does. Something has happened that we can't quite explain, and yet we celebrate it anyway. Something we can't quite explain but we see signs of everywhere we look. It's in the spring air, the flowers, the new leaves. It's in the ocean side and on the beach and the mountaintop. It's in the farthest flung heavens where stars are being born. It's in our lives and the lives of those we love even when we thought we knew them and they surprised us. Even when we thought we knew our own limitations and something happens and we discover something new about ourselves.

It's in this community. This strange community called the Church. A community that fits, but not quite, into the surrounding culture. Every Church that has fully become a product of its culture has always disappeared. But the Church across the ages that knows Resurrection is like the kite that won't quite fold, the three-year-old who won't fit into the fashionable shirt, or the butterfly that no longer fits in its chrysalis.

We are an Easter people. Would it not have been more real to come on Good Friday than today? Crucifixion, after all, makes more sense if you think about it, than Resurrection. Executions have happened throughout history. We know death, suffering and their powerful hold on humanity. We don't need to gather as a community and break bread and share the common cup to "get" death.

No, we gather, because we are an Easter people. Which means we are a people reborn of hope. Which means we recognize what the world calls normal and then add something too strange and wonderful for words to adequately describe. We are the people who shout "life" when the world declares, "death." We are the people who say "arise" when the world says, "lay down." We are the people who recognize something now deeply woven into the fabric of life that is connected profoundly with a God. . . a God who does not quite fit into boxes, whether they are intellectual constructs, ancient human traditions, or tombs hewn out of stone.

Our God in Jesus Christ is a God of surprises, even when it comes to death. Today we remember that death has been re-forged and snatched out of the hands of evil. It is no longer an end for humanity, but a new beginning. Today we celebrate all who have come before us – those who have died but yet are alive somehow, in ways we cannot explain, in all who count themselves in God's children, beyond time, greater than our moment-to-moment existence can even imagine.

Today, we see the empty tomb, revealed to Jesus' followers and at first perplexing them. They have fallen into an unexpected mystery that again fits their Teacher's Way. Remember this Jesus? The one who was always turning the world order upside down? Who said the first are last and the last are first? Who had the power to heal and lead, and might have spawned a violent revolution, and yet instead heals and proclaims God's love for the forgotten and dons a towel and washes his followers' feet?

So why not take on death, too, and turn it upside down? Death becomes not the end but a new beginning. It is a gateway into life that is so incredibly new, it is almost unrecognizable. The women who had followed Jesus find an empty tomb and are perplexed. Even when the angels describe to them what has happened, they can scarcely understand. There is no resuscitated corpse or reanimated body. There is no parlor or magician's trick whereby Jesus somehow managed to survive crucifixion. This is the mystery of New Life. New Hope. And it will not fit into the tomb. It won't even fit into our greatest and best hopes. It is God's New Word for a people hungry for something they cannot describe. It is the transformation that the world searches for. It sets the captives free and brings Good News to the poor and the destitute. It turns hearts of stone into living hearts again. It breathes new life into what was utterly dead. And, in some way, it is the light behind the sunlight, the power that rests at the foundation of the cosmos, the renewal that marks rebirth. It makes common things like bread and wine holy. It silences the powerful and gives voice to the voiceless. It demands everything that we are and then makes it new again.

Look again this Eastertide – all fifty days of it – for the miracles, both great and small, that smell, taste, and feel like the fragrant new Body of Christ. You may not recognize them at first. They might appear in your garden, in your neighbor, in a loved one, or in your own heart. They will appear in this community in unexpected ways. They will surprise us, just as the Resurrection surprised Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the first apostles. They will startle us, just when we thought we understood how everything worked. And they will make us anew.

Our God does not live in boxes, whether made by humanity or death itself. Our God is out of the box. So watch out. Be ready for anything. And find your joy, life, and love renewed.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!