

Not to engage in “inside baseball,” but usually on Easter Sunday I hope to have the opportunity of speaking to at least a few people who are attending more because they want to humor parents or other family members than because they are committed to the Christian faith, and I usually want to address them with two ideas. The first is that *doubt* is good; if one does not have doubts at times one is not paying attention and is not truly engaging with the issues of faith. The second is that to believe in God is no less intelligent and rational than not to believe in God; faith or no faith is not a matter of exercise of the intellect — that may be where *doubt* comes in; not to believe is as irrational as to believe, because God can be neither proved nor disproved. In other words, I seek not to convince anyone but seek to open minds to be fertile soil so that Christianity has a chance to take seed.

But, alas, sometimes Christianity does not have a chance, something poisons the soil, and this past week has shown an example of how this can happen.

Some of you are aware that not only did I live the majority of my real-life working years and then become a minister in Indiana, but in 1992 I actually sought, though I failed to get the nomination, to be governor of Indiana. Indiana holds a very warm spot in my heart. I knew its current governor, and both he and Indiana were, of course, very much in the news this past week. Though I know the governor to be an extremely sincere Christian, he was pretty much caught in a lie as to what a significant number of self-identified Christians supporting the first version of the so-called “Religious Freedom Restoration Act” had wanted to protect.

Now, I am categorically not going to get into legal and political matters today, on this holiest of days, and I am not going to criticize any of you *who have been taught* that people who prefer for their life-partners, or for their recreational partners, people of their own gender, taught that such people are *naughty* people, or, *sinner*s, to use the theological term. Many have been taught that and not because someone dreamed it up, but because, well, their teachers and their teachers’ teachers may not have fully grasped the significance of the one whom God raised from the dead on that first Easter. May not have fully grasped the significance of Easter and of the event that occurred two days before it, three days in the older convention of counting the days involved.

I am referring, of course, to “Good” Friday, the day, all the teachers of Christianity taught us that, whether we embrace the faith or not, Jesus went to the cross and was crucified, and that Jesus died, for . . . for . . .

Well, we are taught, properly taught, the he died for our sins — though I would add, died perhaps not as a legalistic *sacrifice*, but died rather as a demonstration that nothing that humans could do, even killing the Son of God, could separate us from God’s love. And heck, even, no, *especially*, those “hell-fire and brimstone” proclaimers of Christianity and proclaimers of the depravity of all who do not follow those same proclaimers acknowledge that we are all sinners. Or do they? Do they say “we *are* all sinners” or “we *were*; you still are”?

Well, at least as mainline Protestants, we should have no hesitation to acknowledge that we *are* all sinners, every blasted one of us.

Please keep that thought in mind, that *we are all sinners*, every blasted one of us, and let me depart from Indiana current events to other current events that have touched everyone of us this past week, and should — and I mean this — should have caused us to feel a level of humility that none of us, no matter our views, could take with regard to matters in Indiana. 148 Kenyan university students were killed, and scores more injured, *because they professed faith in Jesus Christ!* Several weeks ago, twenty-some Coptic Christians were beheaded because *they professed faith in Jesus Christ!* And Iraqi and Syrian and Pakistani Christians have all been killed for being Christians, as well.

And some who do sincerely profess faith in Jesus Christ find it an *imposition, a restriction on their religious freedom*, to practice their chosen non-religious professions at a wedding between two people of the same gender. Am I missing something?

Forgive me, but I can understand why some people want nothing to do with us Christians, for to teach that being a Christian means not associating with sinners — I am for illustrative purposes accepting for a moment the view of those who would find sin in a same-gender marriage — to teach that being a Christian means not associating with sinners suggests that Jesus *was not necessary*, that God wasted God's son on humans, since humans, or so it seems, humans can avoid being sinners!

And yet, and yet, that same Bible from which some teachers and proclaimers draw their lessons that have taught us about other peoples' sins also teaches us that God made mortals — made *us* — a "little less than gods," or "a little lower than God," "less than divine," depending on the translation.

God made us, made *every blasted one of us*, a little less than divine, and it is the divine God, not us, who judges the sins of humankind in the larger picture of eternity in which we hope to play a part.

Do I seem upset and not filled with Easter joy? Please just bear with me.

This particular Bible story has nothing to do with Easter, er, not obviously. It's the story in the Gospel according to John [4:1-30] in which Jesus is journeying through Samaria and asks a Samaritan — and I think most of us know that to Jesus' fellow Jews, Samaritans were "unclean," — asks a Samaritan woman to draw water from a well for him. He tells her that she has been divorced five times and the man with whom she was living was not her husband, all of which was counter to the Jewish law; Jesus would see her as an adulteress. There would have been every reason why, *in exercise of his religious freedom*, Jesus could have walked away from this woman, could have shunned her, yet Jesus spent time talking to her and teaching her. To him, she was not an imposition.

She was a sinner like every blasted one of us, yet she was not shunned by Jesus, neither was she condemned by Jesus, but offered “living water” by him. Shunning sinners is *not* religious freedom for the *properly taught* Christian; shunning sinners is the opposite of, well, not “WWJD” but of WJWD — the opposite of “what Jesus would do” and of what Jesus *did* do.

Again, do I seem upset? Am I too downbeat for Easter? I do not think so, but please bear with me a moment longer.

Those of you who are regular attendees know that for the last few weeks we have been missing our choir director, George Oberdorf, who had great plans for our music today. He is that delightful fellow with the more or less shaved head who, frankly, always appeared a bit pudgy — as in this picture of him as Elvis in an opera last year, — but whose voice and whose spirit-filled way with us, and especially with our choir, are clearly wonderful gifts of God.

George is sick; he is very sick; he is no longer pudgy, but weighs less than 140 pounds. I shared with you that having had chemotherapy for a recurrence of cancer, his immune system was a wreck and he somehow picked up a parasite that, well, a parasite that a healthy immune system might overcome in a week or so, but that seems to be winning its fight with, and might kill, George.

When we first interviewed George, Jessie started to ask him about his family; I sort of bumped her and afterwards explained that you cannot legally ask those questions in an interview, and besides, it was rather obvious to me that George is gay. Other than by his bedside in a hospital ten days ago, I have not discussed that with George; he knows that I am “soft on gays.” But George does have a partner, and even hyphenates his name on FaceBook, and I honestly do not know whether he and his partner are legally married somewhere. *And I do not give a hoot*; I am not saying I favor or disfavor same sex marriage, but I am saying it has no bearing on my love and concern for George; it also is no threat to me nor to Patricia’s and my marriage nor to the marriage of anyone who has made vows before God.

Next week, we are going to take up a collection for George; he has had to take leave from work and has no income the next three months, he had that costly auto accident a few months back, and he and his partner are in desperate financial shape — as I know may be some of you. No one has to contribute for George, but I ask, *did not Jesus go to the cross for George as much as for me?* I would ask the same in terms of “as much as for you,” but I do not hesitate to say that I am at least as much of a sinner and in as much need of God’s grace nailed to that cross as are George or any of you.

And did not Christ rise again that first Easter to show us that our sin was conquered, conquered not by your and my saying we are Christians and better than that gay guy George, but rather conquered because you and I and gay guy George, every blasted one of us, are beloved children of God for whom Jesus died *so that we might rise again with Jesus?*

I had picked my sermon title before the Kenyan tragedy and before seeing the most recent pictures of George. The topic indeed was to be that the message of Easter is for *all* of God's children — not great Calvinism, perhaps, but I think sound Christianity, — and I had picked as I have every Easter the wonderful and profound hymn, "In the Bulb There Is a Flower" to follow, hence, "Every Bloomin' Thing."

And I believe that the message of the Risen Christ *is* for all. I believe that the message I am meant to teach is the message that all who wish to spread Christianity need to teach and should have been teaching from the beginning: God loves us all; Jesus died for us all, every blasted — er, bloomin' — one of us; Jesus rose for all of us; none of us is more holy than the other.

We are fortunate. None of us is likely to have our life taken from us from professing our faith in Jesus Christ as did those Coptic Christians or those Kenyan or Iraqi or Syrian or Pakistani Christians. We do not need to proclaim Christ with our deaths, instead, we have the opportunity of proclaiming Jesus Christ in the way in which we live, and the most important way in which we proclaim Jesus Christ is by doing as he did, not turning away from the woman at the well, not turning away from *any other human being*, young or old, male or female, rich or poor, gay or straight, but instead offering love, real love — sometimes in tangible form, — to all of God's children, every bloomin' one of them, with the knowledge and comfort of knowing that Christ died for us, and that, as the Apostle Paul wrote, we, have been baptized into his death, and are thereby baptized into his resurrection.

Let this Easter begin a new life in Christ for each of us. Let us emerge from our spiritual tombs, flower from our bulbs, so that we might help the world know the love of God made flesh in Jesus. Let the Christianity that the world sees be what you and I show to George and to one another and, I hope, to all others, for everyone is a child of God, and Christ died and rose to offer hope to all of us, every bloomin' one.

All of our — yours and my — living that love will probably be far more persuasive in planting *and nurturing* the seed of Christianity than any Easter sermon I could offer.

And in the name of the Christ who died for us but rose again that first Easter Day, Amen