

Epworth Chapel on the Green
April 2, 2010
Good Friday
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Psalm 22:1-11
Hebrews 10:1-25
John 19:1-47

As I contemplated again this week the last events of Jesus' earthly life, a question came to my mind that I had never thought of before. Thinking about Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, especially where he asks the Father to spare him his suffering, made the question come to my mind again.

But I immediately put the question out of my mind because it sounds ridiculous. Totally absurd.

And yet, I can't escape it now. The question is this: I wonder if part of the reason Jesus prays to the Father as he does and finds himself in such agony about his suffering and death is because he is *afraid* -- afraid not just to suffer, but afraid to die.

Could it be that Jesus had a fear of death?

I know, it sounds patently absurd. And to ask the question of a Jesus who is fully divine is indeed absurd.

But is the question so far-fetched if it is asked of a Jesus who is fully human?

Speaking as one who is all too human, I won't lie to you. Sometimes I am afraid of death. Sometimes I think about it. Sometimes I wonder what it will be like. Perhaps you do too.

1 Author Annie Trumbull Slosson was a writer of short stories and folk tales, and in one of her short stories she writes about a little boy who has a fear of death. Although my speaking may not capture the full effect of her writing, I'd like to tell you the story of this little boy.

Once there was a little boy that was dreadful scaret o'dyin'.

Some folks is that way, you know; they ain't never done it to know how it feels, and they're scaret. And this boy was that way. He wa'n't very rugged, his health was sort o'slim, and mebbe that made him think about sech things more. 'Tany rate, he was terr'ble scaret o'dyin'. 'Twas a long time ago this was -- the times when posies and creaturs could talk so's folks could know what they was sayin'.

And one day, as this boy, his name was Reuben -- as Reuben was settin' under a tree, an ellum tree, cryin', he heerd a little, little bit of a voice -- not squeaky, you know, but small and thin and soft like -- and he see 'twas a posy talkin'.

'Twas one o'them posies they call Benjamins, with three-cornered whitey blowths with a mite o' pink on 'em, and it

talked in a kind o' pinky-white voice, and it says, "What are you cryin' for, Reuben?"

And he says, "Cause I'm scaret o' dyin'. I'm dreadful scaret o' dyin'."

Well, that posy jest laughed, the most cur'us little pinky-white laugh 'twas, and it says: "Dyin'! Scaret of dyin'? Why, I die myself every single year o' my life."

"Die yourself," says Reuben. "You're foolin'; you're alive this minute."

"Course I be," says the Benjamin. "But that's neither here nor there. I've died every year since I can remember."

"Don't it hurt?" Says the boy.

"No, it don't," says the posy. "It's real nice, You see, you get kind o' tired a-holdin' up your head straight and lookin' peart and wide awake, and tired o' the sun shinin' so hot, and the winds blowin' you to pieces, and the bees a-takin' your honey. So it's nice to feel sleepy and kind o' hang your head down, and get sleepier and sleepier, and then find you're droppin' off. Then you wake up jest at the nicest time o' year, and come up and look 'round --and, why I like to die, I do."

But someways that didn't help Reuben much as you'd think. "I ain't a posey," he think to himself, "and mebbe I wouldn't come up."

Well, another time Reuben was sittin' on a stone in a pasture, cryin' again, and he heerd another little voice. 'Twasn't like the posey's voice, but a wooly, soft, fuzzy voice, and he see 'twas a caterpillar a' talkin' to him. And the caterpillar says, "What you cryin' for, Reuben?"

And the boy says, "I am powerful scaret of dyin', that's why."

And the fuzzy caterpillar laughed. "Dyin'!" He says. "I'm fixin' on dyin myself. All my family die every once in a while, and when they wake up they're jest splendid -- got wings, and fly about, and live on honey and things. Why, I wouldn't miss it for anything."

But somehow that didn't chirk up Reuben much. "I ain't a caterpillar," he says, "and mebbe I wouldn't wake up at all."

Well, there was lots o' other things talked to the boy, and tried to help him -- trees and posies and grass and crawlin' things, that was allers a' dyin' and livin'. Reuben thought it didn't help him any, but I guess it did a little mite,

for he couldn't help a' thinkin' what every one of 'em said.
But he was scaret all the same.

And one summer he begun to fail up faster and faster, and he got so tired he couldn't hardly hold his head up, and he was scaret. And one day he was layin' on the bed, and lookin' out the east winder, and the sun kep' a' shinin' in his eyes till he shut 'em up, and he fell asleep. He had a real good nap, and when he woke up he went out to take a walk.

And he begun to think o' what the posies and trees and creaturs had said about dyin', and how they laughed at his bein' scaret at it. And he says to himself, "Why, someways I don't feel so scaret today, but I s'pose I be."

And jest then what do you think he done? Why, he met an angel. He'd never seed one before, but he knowed it right off. And the Angel says, "Ain't you happy, little boy?"

And Reuben says, "Well, I would be, only I'm so dreadful scaret o' dyin'." "It must be terrible curious," he says, "to be dead."

And the Angel says: "Why, you *be* dead." And he was.

I'm not sure whether or not Jesus feared death. But I know there are times when I do. When I think about it, it's not so much the dying I'm afraid of as it is the not waking up -- the not "coming up" in Reuben's words.

For anyone else here tonight who has ever felt this way, hear these words of Jesus: *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*" [John 11:25-26]

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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