

I recently was told of a conversation that happened last year between a mother and her four year old child Elena. The conversation went something like this:

"Mommy, will the Easter bunny bring me purple jelly beans?"

I am sure he will bring you jelly beans, Elena. But, remember, Easter isn't about the bunny. It's about Jesus.

"Mommy, Will they be purple?"

Yes, honey, I am sure there will be some purple ones in there. Honey, the important thing about Easter isn't the bunny. Easter is about how much Jesus loves you and me and the whole world.

"Mommy, HOW MANY purple jelly beans will the Easter Bunny bring me?"

Elena, I think he will probably bring plenty of purple jellybeans. Do you know how much Jesus loves you?

"Mommy..."

Yes Elena?

"Will he bring me tootsie rolls too?"

My hunch is that you have made it to church this morning because deep down you are yearning to discover that Easter is something much deeper than bunnies and jelly beans. You are yearning to discover that it is more than pastel colors and new outfits. You are yearning to discover that it is much more than visits to see grandparents.

You are yearning to discover that it is much more than an Easter sale at Wal-Mart. My hunch is that you are yearning to catch a glimpse of something that has greater meaning than that. We may not be able to say it, but we certainly feel it.

After Jesus had been crucified and after he rose from the dead, Jesus appeared to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. His disciples are fishing and they catch nothing. Jesus tells them to fish from the other side of the boat. They throw their nets over to the other side and they cannot haul in all of the fish that they have caught.

They haul all of these fish into the boat and head to shore. There on the shore Jesus takes some bread and fish and gives it to them to eat for a great big breakfast. And then we read that this happens.

Read John 21: 15-19

Jesus tells Peter that to follow him means that Jesus will take him to places that he does not want to go. And then he tells Peter, knowing that I will take you to places that you do not want to go, come and follow me.

This past week has been a pretty amazing week around Allison Creek Presbyterian Church. Through these woods over there is a cemetery. That cemetery contains the remains of African-Americans who worked these lands as slaves back in the 1800s. This week this congregation came together with members of three churches that can trace their roots to that cemetery. We toured the cemetery together and we worshiped together.

We left those services with people telling their pastors that they did not want this new relationship to end. That we cannot go back but that we must go forward. That the white people and black people within these congregations have a calling and responsibility to find ways to do ministry together.

Let's be honest here. It is much easier to do things with people that are like you and me. It is much easier to do things with people that think and act like you and me. In many ways, that is the history of this congregation and that may be the history of many of our families. But it may not be our future.

The winds of God's Spirit may be blowing us into a direction which is uncomfortable for some of us, maybe many of us. We may be led toward places where we will need to have some of our past assumptions challenged. Where things we were taught as children may need to be looked at again.

Four year old Elena thinks that Easter is about bunnies and jelly beans. And that is ok for a four year old. Many of us wish that life was that simple. But there will come a time when Elena will face tougher questions in her life than questions about whether the Easter bunny will bring her purple jelly beans or tootsie rolls.

There will come a time when she will face the death of a loved one. If she believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who was raised on the third day she will encounter people who think differently than her and she will have to discover how to be a Christian in the midst of a pluralistic world. She will encounter a world where the understanding of family will be different than the understanding of family held by her parents and grandparents.

She will encounter a world which will struggle with how to heal God's creation. She will encounter a world where technology will create amazing things and also create amazing temptations. The world that Elena will grow into is a world which will look very different than the world that many of us know today.

And that may scare some of you. But remember this text of Scripture. To follow Jesus means to be led into places that you do not want to go. To follow Jesus means that Jesus will push you, and prod you, and unnerve you, and sometimes throw your life into chaos. To follow Jesus means sometimes being led into a dark and musty grave where death is all around.

But the grave is not the end of the journey. Jesus left that grave. And now Jesus extends a hand to each of you and says, "Follow me." Amen.

-Driesell, Rev. Pam, "Beyond bunnies and jelly beans," Day 1, April 24, 2011, and found at http://day1.org/2865-beyond_bunnies_and_jelly_beans

-Text: John 21: 15-19

-Given: April 24, 2011 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)