

Isaiah 25: 6-9
Mark 16: 1-8

Wesley UCA 9/10:30
Easter B 12/04/09

Like Water for Chocolate

I've just had the worst Lent ever—all these long days from Ash Wednesday through yesterday (counting Sundays even though, strictly speaking, they aren't part of Lent), 47 days! And I was sick for 39 of them. This was really an utterly wretched Lent. I am so glad it's Easter day! I am so relieved to finally be feeling better. I am so happy to be back here.

Well, there was actually one good thing about this Lent: being sick made it ever so much easier than usual to keep my traditional Lenten fasting discipline. Since many of you know that I am a self-confessed 'chocoholic,' it will not surprise you that every year I give up chocolate for Lent. Usually I find it very difficult—and I'm sure it is good for both my soul and body to notice that. And I confess that usually I don't manage a perfect discipline—cheating by doing things like have a cappuccino just to get that sprinkle of powdered chocolate on the top. This year I felt almost no such temptation, so at least I'm grateful for that.

Now I know that not all of you like chocolate as much as I do—and I respect that. I also know that some of you maybe even should not ever have it—or at least not much of it—for various health reasons. I understand that too. But from a purely theological perspective, I just can't help but think that at least a little chocolate on Easter Sunday is good for almost everyone.

Because, like Easter itself, there's just nothing quite like chocolate. There is no adequate substitute. It is a unique pleasure.

In her novel *Like Water for Chocolate*, Mexican author Laura Esquivel creatively explores the experience of unrequited love, longing, frustration and stifled imagination—all inter-twined with the most amazing recipes—and the narrator says that an unfulfilled life is like getting water for chocolate, like ordinary existence when what is really desired is extraordinary passion.

I think that Christian life without faith in Christ's resurrection also would be
“like water for chocolate”—
an ordinary happiness when what is really available
is extraordinary joy.

It is, of course, entirely possible to live a good ethical life based on Christian principals without today's celebrations. It is possible to believe in Jesus' teachings, deeply respect his ministry, acknowledge his sacrifice and even lament his death—all of which are valuable things to do—without also greeting this day with excited anticipation. In this I want to be clear that I totally understand people who come along to Good Friday services but give Easter Sunday a miss—Friday is a known reality, however grim that may be, but Sunday is an incomprehensible mystery and that is even more difficult. Not everyone has a taste for such intangible experience.

But, personally, I just can't settle for a 'like water for chocolate' life.

I *choose* to believe in Christ's resurrection—
not because it makes sense,
not because it's easy to do so,
not because it can ever be explained—
but precisely because it is the greatest and most wonderful of all mysteries.

I believe—
not because it sustains the reality of physical life
but because it feeds the hungers of spiritually abundant living.

Did you know that Australians spend on average \$200 million dollars each year on chocolate? We consume an average of 16 kilograms per person per year. We eat more Easter eggs per capita than any other nation in the world. And this year—in the face of economic disaster (and perhaps even because of it)—chocolate sales are up 15%. There is a reason for this: cocoa makes us feel better by increasing the endorphine activity of our bodies—the more cocoa content, the greater effect, which is undoubtedly why I prefer dark chocolate. Ancient peoples of Central and South America knew the value of cocoa in a kind of intuitive way—some even using it medicinally and others using it as currency. This is particularly good news—if we run out of money, we can always barter with chocolate. [Source: TV Channel 7 Today/Tonight 10/04/09]

We have the Spaniard invaders of the Americas in about 1528 to thank for chocolate as we know it today—they added the vanilla and the milk and the spices. Then, unfortunately, we humans continued to tinker with perfection to come up with as many varieties as possible—and eventually the complete imposter of what is called 'White Chocolate,' which has no cocoa at all and doesn't do us any good except for a very temporary sweet taste.

And, as we have done to chocolate, so have we done to the resurrection story—
tinkered with it by additions and deletions,
attached a myriad of explanations,
proposed an ungodly host of theological theories—
until it's meaning, purpose and effect on us has almost been lost except perhaps for
this one taste of sweetness each Easter Sunday.

The resurrection was meant to be so much more—
the foundation story of the church itself,
the ultimate evidence of God's power,
the complete hope of humanity.
Its sweetness was supposed to be for lifetimes, not holiday moments.

Christ's resurrection is the fulfilment of all ancient prophecies of God's salvation,
such as Isaiah describes in his own imagery of “a feast of rich foods and well-aged
wines” [Isaiah 25.6] when God “will swallow up death forever” [Isaiah 25.7] and
“wipe away the tears from all faces.” [Isaiah 25.8]

Mark's gospel—the oldest of the written stories about Jesus—ends with women
disciples who are too afraid to tell anyone what they've experienced at Jesus'
empty tomb. Later writers added twelve verses to Mark's original version because
they could not cope with the ambiguity, wanted to make Mark's gospel read more
like the others that had by then been written, and wanted to leave readers with a
tidy ending in which there would be no doubt whatsoever that Jesus Christ did rise
from the grave and was seen by his male followers too.

No one knows for sure why Mark left the story 'hanging' in such a dramatic way.
In the original Greek the meaning is very pronounced, as in Greek when a double
negative is used it is meant to describe an emphatic action—something that should
end with an exclamation point! And Mark actually uses a triple negative, which if
we translated it literally would read: “they didn't say nothing to nobody!!” [Mark
15.8] Well, we know that they must have eventually said something to someone, or
none of us would be here today—so why does Mark not tell us that?

Some of you may remember my sermon a couple of months ago when I noted four
key words for interpreting Mark's gospel: *speed, simplicity, surprise and secrecy*.
So it really shouldn't puzzle us that these are keys to understanding Mark's
resurrection narrative too—all these attributes present at the end of the gospel just
as they were at the beginning. And all lead to the same joyous wonder: the story
of Jesus is not a simple matter of human reality; it is a story indelibly marked with

divine identity. “This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” [Isaiah 25.9]

It is a mystery—and is meant to be so. To be otherwise would be something ‘like water for chocolate.’

And so my one undeniable message for you today is this: embrace the mystery!

Choose to believe because it is good for you—it will make you feel better in every way as the ‘spiritual endorphines’ within you come alive in unrestrained joy.

Don’t waste any time or energy in an effort to understand—just experience the wonder of it all.

Don’t accept any dilutions or distractions—focus on the true lived reality of your divinely enacted salvation from sin and death.

Bite fully into the best chocolate you can find today—
and let its creamy, tangy, bitter sweetness
just briefly completely overwhelm your taste buds
until it seems that nothing else will ever taste
quite the same again.

That is an Easter experience.

There’s nothing like it. There is no adequate substitute. It is a unique pleasure.

It is chocolate for chocolate.