

An Easter Story: The Empty Egg

"Had he understood what she had said about Jesus' death and resurrection? Did he understand to bring back the egg with something inside? Perhaps she should call his parents and explain it to them..."

Author's Note

I first heard the following story twenty-some years ago at Kanuga's Conference Center in North Carolina told by The Reverend Harry Pritchard. Here is an adapted version that seems to have circulated widely and I think it would make a lovely story to share during Eastertide. While it may seem dated in its understanding of the special needs of children and how we minister with them, throughout the years it still holds the same beauty, truth and poignancy.

The Empty Egg

Jeremy was born with a variety of disabilities. Attending a small church, at the age of twelve he was becoming more difficult to have in the Sunday school classroom, comprised of children much younger than him. His teacher, Doris Miller, often became exasperated with him. He would squirm in his seat, and make inappropriate noises. At other times, he spoke clearly and distinctly, as if a spot of light had penetrated the darkness of his brain. Most of the time, however, Jeremy just irritated his teacher.

One day she decided to meet with his parents after church. As they entered the empty classroom, Doris said to them, "Jeremy really has trouble being in the classroom. It isn't fair to him to be with younger children who don't have learning problems. Why, there is a five year gap between his age and that of the other children."

Jeremy's mother cried softly into a tissue, while her husband spoke. "Doris," he said "there is no other class he would fit in. It would be a terrible shock for Jeremy if we had to take him out of your class. We know he really likes it here."

Doris sat for a long time after they had left, staring at the snow outside the window. Its coldness seemed to seep into her soul. She wanted to sympathize with them. But it wasn't fair to keep him in her class. She had other youngsters to teach, and Jeremy was a distraction.

As she pondered the situation, guilt washed over her. "Here I am complaining when my problems are nothing compared to that family, trying to meet what were probably many medical bills due to his various issues," she thought. "Lord, please help me to be more patient with Jeremy." From that day on, she tried hard to ignore Jeremy's noises and his blank stares.

Then one day, he ran into the classroom. "I love you, Miss Miller," he exclaimed, loud enough for the whole class to hear. The other students snickered, and Doris' face turned red. She stammered, "Wh-why, that's very nice, Jeremy. N-now, please take your seat."

Spring came, and the children talked excitedly about the coming of Easter. Doris told them the story of Jesus, and then to emphasize the idea of new life springing forth, she gave each of the

children a large plastic egg. "Now," she said to them, "I want you to take this home and bring it back next week with something inside that shows new life." The children responded enthusiastically - all except Jeremy. He listened intently; his eyes never left her face. He did not even make his usual noises. Had he understood what she had said about Jesus' death and resurrection? Did he understand to bring back the egg with something inside? Perhaps she should call his parents and explain it to them.

That evening Doris' kitchen sink stopped up. She called her landlord and waited for an hour for him to come by and unclog it. After that, she had a crazy week at work. She completely forgot about phoning Jeremy's parents.

The following Sunday, the children entered her classroom, laughing and talking as they placed their eggs in the large wicker basket on the table in the room. They eagerly waited to open all the eggs. In the first egg, they discovered a flower. "Oh yes, life!" she said. "When plants peek through the ground, we know that spring is here." The next egg contained a plastic butterfly, which looked very real. "We all know that a caterpillar changes and grows into a beautiful butterfly. Yes, that is new life, too." Next, a rock with moss on it was discovered in an egg. She explained that moss, too, showed life.

Then they opened the fourth egg. The egg was empty. Doris figured it was Jeremy's egg and he had not understood what he was supposed to do with it. Not wanting to embarrass him, Doris moved it to the side and was about to open another egg. Suddenly Jeremy spoke up, "Aren't you going to talk about my egg?"

Flustered, Doris replied, "But this egg is empty."

He looked into her eyes and said softly, "Yes, but Jesus' tomb was empty, too. Jesus was killed and put in there. Then God raised him up. So the egg should be empty on Easter."

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