

THE AFTER EASTER MESSAGE
[written in oral form]

{A few weeks ago, Ben asked me to trade preaching dates, and that is why I'm preaching today. As I was contemplating the trade and reviewing the passage for today, I happened to sort through an old archive box, and I came across an article I wrote for the Canadian Mennonite, back in 2009. The article was based on this very text. Much of this sermon is an adaptation of that story...which features a duck. And, now you know the reason for the duck pictures.

So,... onto the today's text. }

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According to John's account:

In the evening, after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples. There were timidly hiding behind locked doors – likely nervous about a potential purge; they did not want to be crucified, too. So, they hid themselves. They knew that they were not appreciated in Jerusalem. The authorities had killed Jesus, and probably wanted to rid the area of **all** the followers of Christ.

They were anxious and afraid when Jesus appeared before them, and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

Proving that **he was for real** by showing them his hands and side, Jesus again said, “**Peace be with you!** Peace be with you as the father has sent me so I now send you. Peace be with you, as the father has sent me, so I now send you.”

They understood, .....and were empowered by the Holy Spirit.

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Thomas was absent at the time, and later was told about the encounter, but insisted on **experiencing the risen Jesus**, too – **he wanted proof**; he wanted to experience it.

A week went by, and Jesus appeared before them again, this time Thomas was present. And **again**, Jesus said, “**Peace be with you.**” He then, allowed Thomas to experience: to experience Jesus’ marks of pain and suffering. And Jesus added, “blessed are those who have not seen, *have not experienced the pain*, and yet have come to believe. Those words were written for all the subsequent followers of Christ -- for us.

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Three times in this passage, Jesus said, “**Peace be with you.**”

Obviously, this was an important message for them to hear:

**PEACE BE WITH YOU!**

Moreover, and just as important to note about these two episodes with Jesus is that his Message for them was a “**Commissioning.**”

Jesus was sending them out with a message.

By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was sending them out with instructions / with this message:

**Peace be with you, as the father has sent me, so I now send you.**

**Peace be with you, as the father has sent me, so I now send you.**

Peace be with you.

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Back in 1967, the Saturday before Palm Sunday, my sister, Carolyn, was home from university during her spring break, and had just returned from the shopping mall with an unusual surprise. She had succumbed to the *cuteness factor*, and for one dollar bought an “**Easter duckling**.”

Back in those days, our society had lost touch with the harmony of nature, and sold “little fuzzy” Easter things alive— baby ducks and baby chickens. Sometimes they even coloured the baby chicks--bizarre by today's standards.

Anyway, suddenly, we had a baby duck to play with for a few days. No one thought that it would live very long. Even so, we set up a box, in the kitchen. The box was lined with newspapers, and contained a dish basin of water as a small swimming pool. We built a ramp with stones up to the basin so the duck could get into the water.

And of course, we had to name it. After various suggestions, we decided on “**Webster**” because it had webbed feet— not real creative.

Webster the duck survived frequent hands that grabbed and petted. He survived the neighbour boy who lifted him up by his long neck, which became swollen for a couple of days after that.

Before long, a bigger box was needed, and that was placed in the garage, and soon, all of the garage was Webster's domain.

Since, it appeared that this Easter novelty pet was going to endure, a more permanent arrangement had to be made.

We fenced in the corner of the backyard— an area of 35' by 15', and we placed in the fenced area an old inflatable, plastic, child's pool, but it didn't last long. Those web feet have claws, too.

So, I dug a small pond: a big hole in the ground, big enough for Webster to swim around a little.

Amazingly, the heavy clay soil held the water, but..... for an obvious reason, the water had to be changed— emptied and replaced every few days or it would get real smelly.

In a few weeks, Webster was a large, beautiful white duck. He was of the white Peking variety.

Peking ducks are domestic ducks, and they can't really fly very well; they can just skim the ground for a short distance,which means they are fairly vulnerable.

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Webster loved to keep himself clean: preening his feathers both while in the water and on land. Then, he would climb on top of a rock next to the pond, and proudly flap his wings. Needless to say, Webster had a home, **and** a growing place in our hearts, **especially mine**.

Since, I was the primary care giver, we sort of “Bonded.” He would follow me everywhere I went. We even took long walks together along busy streets — Just another boy and his duck.

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I learned a lot about ducks, and discovered they make great pets. Except for providing a swimming hole, they require little care: just some “cracked corn” on the side, now and then. Webster would forage around for insects, and loved to eat dandelion flowers, which pleased my father.

However, his favourite delicacy was earthworms.

Every time I worked the garden, Webster would be at my heels, and quickly snatch each worm that was exposed, and devour it like spaghetti. < It was kind a gross,.... but he seemed to enjoy them.

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Interestingly, a duck is a better “watch dog” than a dog— being a bird, he was very sensitive to intruders. From the back yard, Webster could even sense when someone was approaching the house in the front yard. He would warn all with loud, long quacks.

He had different quacks for different circumstances. Each morning, when Webster would detect activity in the house he would start walking around, making a quick tempo, contented quack.

I guess you could say I learned the duck language. I could understand what he was saying, in a general sort of way, and found out that he was intelligent, *even wrote a dictionary*, perhaps you have read it. Just kidding.

Webster **was** an intelligent duck; he knew his name, and would come when he was called. So, we often just let him roam about, and if he was out of sight too long, all I had to do was call out **Webster**, and he would quickly waddle back.

He did love to roam around, especially after a heavy rain, which would flood the back yard— temporarily making a large marsh.

For some reason, Webster did not like the lady next door.

I'd hear a scream, .....and run outside, and see him chasing her around in her backyard. She often wore sandals, and Webster would try to nip at her toes. *I don't know if they looked like worms to him or maybe he.... just.... didn't ...like her.*

Regardless of his infatuation with her toes, a simple call brought him back.

Webster did like to come in the house. He would stand next to the sliding glass door, and knock on it with his beak to be let in. However, his visits had to be monitored closely, *I don't think birds can be house broken.*

Webster managed pretty well through rain, storms or snow; he endured. Even stray dogs were chased away.

Webster was also very gentle. He enjoyed being held, and he would even rest his neck on my shoulder and sleep. Frequently, he would contentedly sleep that way while I watched T.V.

He was very much a member of the family, and of course we shared Christmas with him; he would stand next to the tree, and stare at the blinking lights.

**Webster was pretty special.**

I even entered him in a talent show. In spite of the distraction of the audience, he showed off his knack for playing “soccer”. He could roll the ball back and forth across the floor with his beak.

He was very special, yet, .....by early fall of 1969, I was sixteen, and a duck just wasn't “**macho**” enough.

So, I got a dog— a little black puppy, with big feet. His father was a German Shepherd, and his mother was a Lab – *a bird dog*.

In spite of his genetic disposition, I felt I had to protect the little puppy from Webster. So, I kept them separate from each other. I was afraid Webster would stake his claim a little too aggressively, and Webster was much bigger than the puppy. Though, .....by Springtime, I had my big **macho dog**. He was all black, and I called him Joe.

Webster was still special, **still family**, .....but **Joe** was **raw brute force** that fed my ego and .....catered to my surging testosterone . He was big, rambunctious and strong. I enjoyed wrestling with him. I taught him that whenever I got down on my knees there were no rules,..... and we would have a free for all fight.

When I was on my knees, he would leap and attack me, at times ripping the skin open on my arms and hands with his teeth. I would throw him back like one would repel an attacking wild animal.

Again and again we would fight that way,.... but as soon as I stood up, he knew it was time to stop.

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At sixteen and full of raw energy, I loved the challenge, and the blood was my badge of courage. I thought I was pretty clever teaching him to react while on my knees, but it turned out to be an ill conceived, ...**dumb signal**.

He thought children were adults on their knees. So, because of that conditioned response, we had to keep him chained up most of the time.

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Our backyard presented an interesting contrast. Two animals, two zones: **Webster** in his fenced in area, nicely landscaped with a little pond, .....And **Joe** tethered by a chain over beat and worn out grass.

Side by side, the soft and gentle next to the rough and aggressive. The prey and the predator.

*How often **do many of us** try to sustain the same tension in our lives?*

We love the pure and gentle, yet we are also infatuated by the seduction of the high energy of brute force. And, there is great tension trying to keep both fed.

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And, there are consequences, and there.....were... consequences.

No longer could Webster roam. No longer was Webster the centre of attention. Joe demanded attention!

He had to be fed each day, he had to be walked each day.

Webster could wait – a person only has so much time in one day.

I couldn't commit to both, but..... I knew Webster was special.

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**Something had to give, .....and it did.**

Late in the night, in the wee hours of July 20<sup>th</sup>, I heard Joe barking. I looked out the window, and saw that he was loose. From my bedroom window, I called for Webster, ...but there was no reply.

Rushing outside I discovered Joe's chain leading through a freshly dug hole under the fence, then wrapped around the bird feeder post, collar still attached without the dog. **Joe was free.**

White feathers covered the ground. Concluding the worst, I grabbed Joe, dragged him to the house, put him in the garage, and wrote a terse note before sadly going back to bed.

I wrote to my parents, "I think Joe got Webster, if so **good-bye Joe.**"

In the morning, my father saw the note, and put Joe back on his chain.

Searching for Webster, my father saw feathers everywhere even many floating on the pond, and then he discovered the mangled body behind a bush. Thinking nothing could be done, and in a hurry for an appointment he left.

About an hour later, I got up and explored the carnage only to discover that **Webster was still alive!**

I called my father at work; he rushed home.

Tenderly we placed Webster in a pan of warm water and carried him inside. We tried to clean his wounds. Not a feather remained on his back from tail to head; his raw flesh showed the cruel teeth marks from the fierce mauling he had endured.

One wing was badly chewed up, and his neck was ripped open.

He laid their helplessly looking up at us with a look that said, "**you should have known! .....you should have known!**"

Amazingly, he had survived for hours after the attack. I don't know why, perhaps, it was just a strong will to live or maybe he just wanted us to see him alive. ??

**But**, within a couple of minutes, Webster tensed up, and defiantly spread his wings wide open for one last moment, [ ] then gently folded them back, curling his neck around, tucking his beak under a wing and he died.

I sat numb for a long time while my father buried him, filling in the pond with dirt.

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When we humans suffer loss and are deeply hurt, we tend to either hide behind locked doors or aggressively lash back.

I was crushed with grief, and swore to never have a pet again.

Tormented with pain, anger and confusion. I vowed never to risk being hurt, again by having a pet.

But I did have another pet – a murderer / a ruthless killer!

With a sense of **righteous vengeance**, I felt the passion to be the avenging angel, ...to do “redemptive violence, and so I grabbed a baseball bat and marched toward the back door.

My father was coming in as I was going out, realizing what was unfolding he stopped me, and said, “Let’s talk.” I bellowed, “**Joe deserves to be punished; he did an evil thing.**”

And I was right! He killed Webster, and I was deeply wounded.

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*We have a tendency to lash out when we’ve been unjustly hurt. We are tempted to defend ourselves.... from pain....all in the name of defending justice.*

With self righteousness, we desire to expose the evil, to crush the evil by attacking the perpetrator. Yet, it is really revenge, and is usually done just to make ourselves **feel** better.

Collectively as a nation, we too often parade the blood stains and war memorials, and then react with multi-million dollar weapons.

As individuals, the weapon of choice is commonly our tongue, and a not a baseball bat.

**And we know we are right, we know we have every right!**

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My father asked me to calm down, and also asked, “will beating Joe make things better?”

I countered, “Well, **then, good-bye Joe.**”

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My father sat me down, and explained a better response / a restorative solution / A peaceful way.

He said, “Joe is your pet, too. He did a terrible thing, but he was **taught to be violent**, he was **taught to be violent**. Joe is a dog, an animal, one of God’s creatures.

**\*\* Can Joe be taught kindness and gentleness?**

Is there no hope for him?”

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I was confronted with a message of peace, forgiveness and healing, **yet** I struggled with grief, and a hurt that made me angry. And, my idea of justice was to get even,..... to get revenge.

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My emotions wanted vengeance, yet somewhere deep down, my spirit confirmed my father’s message. I was upset because of an act of violence, ..... so how could I justify my own act of violence?

But, I had unresolved pain, and out back was the source of that pain!

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While tumbling in confusion, I looked out in the backyard, and did not see a killer, ...but instead saw a victim, a dog who was **taught** to be violent.

Joe, with a tilted head and puzzled expression looked back at me.

I wonder what he saw?

I wonder what he thought of my internal struggle?

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Then I realized, my angry desire that I called **justice** was real, but, justice is **not vengeance / justice is not destruction.**

Justice includes graciously correcting the evil, graciously working for good, transforming the broken to peace and wholeness.

**That is justice. That is God's way!**

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When each of us look back on our lives, most of us have been, unfortunately, in similar situations, maybe many times.

We have been in situations when people have hurt us or someone dear to us, and we thought that they deserved to be punished, they deserved a piece of our mind, they deserved to be laid low,..... they deserved vengeance.

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Looking back, .....I now can imagine how the disciples felt: their best friend, teacher and prophet, Jesus was brutally killed.

And, out of fear and grief, they were hiding, ....and likely wishing they could "get even."

Then, they were confronted with the **risen Lord**, who was still bearing the scars. They were confronted in the midst of grief and were reminded about Christ's way / God's way--the way of healing and peace. That message for healing was to be their mission.

No wonder Jesus kept saying to them, "Peace be with you, Peace be with you, Peace be with you!" Jesus didn't want them to hurt back or.. to act like a victim.

Moreover, they had a mission: to go out and change the world.

To be the peace as they teach peace and healing. Jesus sent them out with the message, "Peace be with you!"

To the very people who killed Jesus, the disciples were sent out to show and **teach** the perpetrators the way of peace, to teach them the good news that God through Jesus overcame evil and there is grace.

**God is gracious!**

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The disciples were told to boldly go out to the **predators**, and teach them God's way of peace and forgiveness.

This is the after Easter message: to be at peace.....AND....to teach/ model the way of healing and peace. This commission to ministry means much more than merely being a passive "peaceful presence." To be sure, we must radiate peace that comes from trusting God, but we must also be proactive. We must teach God's way of healing and restoration.

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We must remember this message whenever we are wounded, and practice grace and peace with each other.

And, we must make this transforming message our mission, too.

Our society needs to hear and learn God's way.

Thomas didn't believe until he saw the scars. Perhaps, we can teach our nation to avoid the scars, the bloodshed and the regret, by not doing violence as a response.

There is a better way, and it is the way of Christ.

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Was my dog Joe punished or killed?

**No**, thanks to my father, passing on the message of grace, Joe lived on. Joe remained a pet, and I taught him gentleness. Within a couple months, he no longer needed to be tethered to a chain.

**\*Joe did not get what he deserved.**

He deserved punishment.

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To each of us, God confronts us with the voice of Jesus: Peace be with you, peace be with you, peace be with you, **now go and live that peace!**

But,do we see the smile of God in this message?

We don't receive what we deserve!

Instead, we are offered forgiveness, peace and God's grace.

We are offered grace. ~~~~~ Peace be with you!