



What an odd Sunday this is. Officially, we're still celebrating Easter-- that's why I'm still wearing white, and we're still lighting the big paschal candle.

But there's no story today about the risen Jesus. It sounds like bad planning - as if the people who pick the readings ran out of Easter stories before the Easter season was over.

But maybe something else is going on. Maybe, instead of being shown more Easter scenes, we're being invited to go behind the scenes. Like when you rent a movie on DVD and you get special features that take you behind the scenes to show you how the movie was made.

Today we go behind the scenes of those amazing Easter stories we've been hearing. The writer of 1 John swings the camera around and makes an equally amazing revelation: God is love.

That's the truth behind every Easter story: God is love.

It isn't always obvious.

On a beautiful spring day, with birds singing, and dogwoods and azaleas blooming, with warm sunshine and a gentle breeze, sure. The God who made all this beauty must be love. It's a no-brainer.

Not so easy when we're afraid.

When the x-ray shows something in our body that doesn't belong there.

When the person we love most in all the world is suffering.

When we get laid off from our job and don't know how we're going to pay our bills.

When the person who does the hiring looks at our carefully prepared resume and says, "You're overqualified."

When depression makes our future look like heavy black cloud as far as the eye can see.

In the depths of personal struggle, God's love can seem like a fairy tale.

Even this beautiful planet that produces such miracles every spring can call God's love into question. What kind of God creates a world with hurricanes and earthquakes and tsunamis? Why do diseases and deformities strike babies and children?

The Bible is honest about all this. We had the ending of Psalm 22 today, but we sang an antiphon from the psalm's first verse: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me. The psalm continues:

My God, I cry out during the day, but you don't answer;
even at nighttime I don't stop.

¹⁵ My strength is dried up like a piece of broken pottery.
My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you've set me down in the dirt of death.

For thousands of years, believers have struggled make sense of it all. Why all this suffering? Why me? Why doesn't God DO something?

The movie "Tree of Life." shows scenes in the life of a family, starting when the parents learn that their adult son has died, and flashing back to scenes showing the son as a young boy growing up with his brothers and young parents. In between these family scenes are images of outer space, stars and planets and galaxies, and images of the beginnings of life on earth. The soundtrack includes a choir singing as well as the whispered prayers of the grieving mother. At one point the mother asks the Creator of all the magnificence that we see, "What ARE we to you?"

Our need for answers can be so strong. Yet the answers people give us fall flat. People say, "God works in mysterious ways." Or, "It was God's will." Or, "Some good will come of this."

I've never met anyone who's said those kinds of answers were helpful.

Here is God's answer: The Word became flesh and dwelled among us, full of grace and truth. The Eternal Word through whom this astonishing world was created, put skin on. Lived among us, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. Shared in our suffering and death, and rose as a pledge of our liberation.

And that is the chief reason we say God is love. The Word of God became present, in the flesh. Came right up beside us and stayed with us.

At my church in Brooklyn, a young man living far from home received the news that his father died unexpectedly. The young man sat on the floor of our apartment, and as he poured out his grief, our dog did exactly the right thing: she walked over to him, gave him a "kiss," curled up on the floor at his feet, and stayed with him. As the young man stroked her warm, soft fur, healing began.

And this is what God has done for us, in Jesus. Drawn near to us. Stayed with us. And begun the healing of the world.

God is love. God is love, and the world is transformed. It isn't obvious, but it's true just as as the caterpillar is transformed into a beautiful butterfly that stretches it's brand-new wings in the sun and soars, leaving its shell behind.

We are transformed too: called, washed in the waters of Baptism, and gathered and fed at this table as members of Christ's living Body. We are transformed, so that when we are faithful, those who see us may know that "God is love."