

Crossing Real Life With Easter—In Bangkok, With Terri Schiavo

Colleagues,

Two pieces for the Octave of Easter make up this posting. Both received this Easter weekend from dear friends. Each one “crossing” a slice of life in the world of its author with the Gospel of Easter. Ken Dobson, Presbyterian missionary and college prof, lives and works in Bangkok, Thailand. Ken was our host last year when we were in Southeast Asia on our mission junket. Al Jabs, recently retired Crossings board member, with a distinguished career as college history prof, plus long years of activity on the side of the angels in racially conflicted America (from which he has NOT retired), lives in Lexington, South Carolina. Peace & Joy
Ed Schroeder

THE TOUCH OF EASTER

I never was much into Easter bunnies. But sixty years or so ago we found Easter candies in little nests made of this and that all around the house. It was how we welcomed Easter morning. Then there was Sunday School at the State Street Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville, and the feature was pansies. Every child in Sunday School got a pansy in a little paper cup. There were lilies for the big people, but they didn't leave as much of an impression as the smiling pansies. It was during the war.

Chocolate was scarce...so was sugar. But colored candy Easter eggs and pansies signified all that counted about Easter to an about-to-be five-year-old.

Time has taken me far from Morgan County, Illinois, and I am not expecting to find little nests of colored candy around my house here in ant paradise. I'm into lowered-sugar intake anyway to control weight-gain (since actual weight loss is not happening), in late middle-age, or early old-age, whichever. And here in Thailand Easter is just another Sunday, except for the Christians who seem to be keeping it a secret. The big ceremonies here are sunrise services in the Christian cemeteries, which gives most folks the creeps just thinking about it.

How are we going to tell the Great News that "HE HAS RISEN"? The big question around here, among all the non-Christians, is "Why did he die in the first place?" If Jesus was God, it doesn't figure. Gods don't have to die. Those that die don't count as top-ranking gods. So we Christians have a public-relations problem with Easter. Last year the gory images of the movie "The Passion of Christ" helped explain the grimmer side of Good Friday, but movies' answer to the big question, "Why?" is the atonement, somebody had to die, so God let Jesus do it.

I read an article about the atonement controversy the other day. The theory says that the Father paid for our sins with the blood of His Son. Women theologians are joining the attack on the atonement theory on the basis that it creates an image of God that is way into violence, advocates blood sacrifices, and justifies torture and death as a way of settling scores. The argument about why Jesus had to die dates back to the beginning. Paul tried to explain it to the Jews; Luke tried to explain it to the Romans, John to the Greeks. But the rationale for Easter hasn't stayed explained. Every generation has had to

do it all over again.

Usually we resort to metaphors, symbols, comparisons. "Well, it's like the lilies, see? They look like they're dead, but then one day they break into these wonderful flowers with this fantastic aroma, see?" Or, like the pansies.

Over here in South-East Asia it would be our turn to explain it to the Buddhists and Muslims, if we could find any who were interested. For the most part they are not interested until we catch their attention by some act of generosity or compassion. People are much more interested in the Jesus story after they realize that it is behind the healing touch of the doctors treating their leprosy, the comforting touch of the home-care visitors taking care of their AIDS, the willing touch of the tsumani teams sorting through the corpses and then helping rebuild homes. "You mean you gave up your nice comfortable life to come here and help us deal with this?" "Yes, well, it's a little like what Jesus did coming down from heaven to help sort things out 2000 years ago." It makes sense, depending on who's saying it and what their hands have been doing to the one listening.

That's how Easter is happening here. How's it happening for you?

Ken Dobson

WHY I SUPPORT THE HUSBAND OF TERRI SCHIAVO

by Dr. Albert E. Jabs

I support the decision of the husband of Terri Schiavo for the following reasons; more importantly, my wife and I had to make that decision back in 1975 when our son, Dirk, was faced with

the same dilemma. No one can make that decision without personally agonizing over the person, and particularly so when it is a loved one in the immediate family.

At such a time, you do not know how to pray; therefore, you draw on the intercessory power of the Holy Spirit who utters sighs on our suffering behalf and tht of your loved one. Authentic Christian faith has always acclaimed the power of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, who broke the power of death and its dominions on earth, below the earth, and even into the universe; this is what the Resurrection really means. Now, back to the Schiavo case.

The Terri Schiavo contention is really about the Resurrection of the dead. If you are part of that Easter enclave that truly believes in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, then this will motivate your vision of both life and death. This is the primary issue, irrespective of the involvement of the Congress or the President of the United States. The TV talking heads, of course, are having a feeding frenzy in all of this, but the majority of the psychobabble is devoid of any grasp of what the Christ Resurrection is all about.

Think for a moment about the latest school house slaughter up in Northern Minnesota and remember the Columbine massacre back in 1999; in both tragic instances, we have people who believed more in the power of death, than in the power of Christ's Resurrection. This was also true with the 19 fanatics who hit the Trade Tower in New York. Yes, as it has been stated elsewhere ... we do live in many ways in a culture of death. I am uneasy with the easy abortion rates since the Roe decision. This unease moves me to comment on the 20,000 individuals who died yesterday with disease, poverty, land mines, and other causes.

The blatant cynicism of this world is part of the death culture that thinks it is all right to wink at genocide in the Sudan, international trafficking of women, girls/boys, weapons of mass destruction, and in the general drop of civic discipline. The Pentecostal Power of the Resurrection speaks to all of this. This is Easter Week ... and it is a great time to reflect on this. The Resurrection gives life and salvation because it speaks of the forgiveness of sin. Instead of a world that parodies sin as fun, until it hits with awful death/tragedy, each of us needs to think of our complicity and indifference to the death culture of our times. The corporation profits are obscene when you juxtapose the needs of about 1 million of the desperate, the quiet dying of thousands each day. Where is our trust? Environmental degradation and the stewardship of our precious environment should spur us to conserve the resources of our shrinking globe. The world needs to organize on behalf of the dying minority, as large as the task may seem to be, or as great as our compassion fatigue may be.

The flood of weapons are part of the killing machinery of this world, and people make death profits on this, which is as obscene as those who make profits on the billion dollar pornographic industry. Why, even in my small Lexington County an attempt was made to put profits/poisons over people in pollution issues. In Colossians, it is clearly stated that God has made all things in Jesus Christ, and it is this Christ Resurrection that sustains this shaking world. Yet, alliances and allegiances can be made with exploitative powers that have visions of destructiveness at the core of their hearts. More than ever, we need the witness of each of us, and the Christian church, to share life, salvation, and the Resurrection concerning the Terri Schiavo Case and any other case in this changing, relativistic world.

Therefore, my hope in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ causes

me to side with the husband. My wife and I have already made that awful decision in the case of our son, Dirk, who went to heaven at the age of eight years old in 1975. Dear Reader, what is your vision, and what decision would you make . . . and why?

Albert E. Jabs