

I found this small feather at my door step the other day. It's amazing to look at; to see the perfection displayed in this beautiful feather; nature's handiwork. But it was an unfortunate incident that brought the feather to my door. There had been a small tragedy there in the woods. The feather was part of a gift my cat had dropped there. She had killed a beautiful chickadee. Now I felt really bad, because I put out seed for the birds and the chickadees dart in and out from the feeder most of the day. I also feed the cat—quite well too, but that did not seem to alter her instinct to snag a bird if the circumstances were right. If I hadn't let the cat out, that beautiful bird would still be flitting around the woods.

My sister and brother-in-law have a cat. He came to them as a stray and they took him in; named him Charlie. They also feed birds—a lot more seriously than I do. They have several feeders and all high off the ground. They get a great variety of birds and when Charlie started to do the same thing: *get* a great variety of birds; things got a bit tense in his life. First, he wasn't allowed outside during daylight. That was pretty hard on this stray cat; it didn't work. Then my sister got Charlie a harness and leash and would take him out—go walk the cat. That didn't quite work. Finally, they got a wire cage—fairly large; and they'd take Charlie out with them in this cage, while they worked in the garden or pattered in the yard. That didn't work very well. I think they even attacked the problem from the other side of the equation; they stopped feeding birds and let the cat come and go; but that didn't work well either—for them and the great pleasure they lost without the birds! They really tried to keep the situation under control—for the cat and for the birds and for themselves. But their best efforts eventually led them to accept what you might call the happy medium. Charlie gets to go out. The birds get to eat. They get to watch the birds. And now and then, feathers appear at their doorstep too.

It's no secret to any of us. We don't live in a perfect world. We cannot control life in an effort to make it perfect. And I know we try; try and fail; and try again. In fact there are many good things we accomplish as we try. This dike out here lining this river is one good attempt to make our world a bit more perfect. But we've had experience with how such efforts can still be breached like the best efforts of the levees failing there in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

We surely know we don't live in a perfect world, any more than Mary did; any more than Peter did; really, any more than Jesus did. And just like Mary, we will run around and try to pick up the broken pieces and put things in some sense of order again—bring some sense of control back into our shaken lives. Just like Peter, we can argue with the plan of God—remember how he challenged Christ to wash more than just his feet there at the last supper; we can argue and we can ignore and we can doubt that God even has a plan because if there was, then why wouldn't God simply eliminate the imperfection in this world; stop cats from catching birds; keep levees from breaking; in fact why would Jesus even have to walk the way of the cross; suffer the humiliation with the venom of humanity spitting out at him; die a cruel death before the eyes of those who loved him; before those who mocked him; before a world that continues to wallow in the tragedies of its own making. Surely God has that power. In Christ's resurrection, the ultimate power in life; over life—death; was overpowered by the will of God; God's will to raise Jesus from the dead.

Sometimes I think that there is an even greater power than the power over death that is God's; and that is God's power to give us the ability to choose what we do in life. Every parent will quickly identify with this power as you raise your children. Sometimes you may wish you could make every choice for them. Sometimes you may try to! And sometimes you may wonder why you slowly let them go as they grow; slowly give them the responsibility to make their own choices. But you do.

It is within God's power to remove our ability to choose in this life but God has not done that. Jesus' life on this earth as a human being boldly underlines that fact. Jesus chose in his life to love God; chose to obey God; chose to fulfill the will of God for his life even at the cost of his life. And God let the world choose what it would do about Christ—there are some who chose to follow him; some chose not to; and some chose to plot against him and get rid of him.

We say over and over that God is love. What is love without choice? You cannot truly love someone because you have to. Don't you find that love is something you give because you want to? When you find the love of your life, your relationship will grow and grow only as you choose to have that happen; only as you make choices all along the way to nurture that love; and many of those choices come as sacrifices; come as you give *yourself* to the other; as you choose *not* to have the last word; as you choose to support one another.

God chooses to love us; chooses to be in relationship with each one of us; chooses to let us respond to that love; that involvement with our lives. Jesus came and taught us about choices in life that reflect love: things like thinking of others first—going the second mile; giving more than asked—a coat and a cloak; helping a stranger—someone you have no reason to be invested in with a cup of water—with a kind gesture; treating each other kindly; fairly; always as equals; even making the supreme sacrifice for another by laying down your life. You would do that for someone you deeply loved, wouldn't you? Jesus did that for those he loved—for you and me; the Bible says for the world. God gave him that choice, and anguished as Christ was to make it, he did; and we recognize it is the supreme word of love in our lives that we are given the choice to respond to—or not; respond to the love of God for us revealed through Jesus.

Mary's perfect world with Christ had fallen apart when he was taken and crucified. But when she found him again, there amongst the tombs, her shaken life rebounded with joy. The whole difference for her was the presence of Christ in the midst of that garden; from then on, the presence of Christ in her life. It is the same for us in our own imperfect worlds. Even as we try to bring control; work at perfecting what is not right in our worlds, can we remember that Christ is present with us in our own lives; Jesus the Son of God; the *perfecter* of our faith; the one who brings reason to our unreasonable lives as we live with the faith and understanding that our lives are in the hands of God?

Easter says that God is the one in control; the one with ultimate power in heaven and on earth; our God of everlasting love. You may wish for perfection to follow, but that is not the way of love. It is the way of peace, though; perfect peace of heart and mind as you see Christ there, in the midst of life; of your life. There is indeed one who knows; who has a plan; one who will see you through. Find your peace—perfectly with the one who loves you ultimately. Happy Easter! Amen!

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