

**Trinity Sunday, Year C**  
**June 16, 2019**  
**Saint James, Wheat Ridge**

**By the Rev. Becky Jones**

Did anyone here ever have a favorite stuffed animal?  
Or maybe you had another favorite toy when you were a child.  
A toy that you loved dearly and were always carrying around.

I did.  
I had a stuffed Yogi Bear.  
I loved that bear so.  
I slept with it. I hugged it.  
I hauled it around with me from room to room.  
Yogi Bear was my constant companion.  
And you can imagine what that bear looked like  
After a period of this most loving abuse.  
He was raggedy, and his ear was torn.  
But it didn't matter to me.  
He was my Yogi.  
Maybe there was a Yogi Bear in your life.  
Or a teddy.

Today's lesson from Paul's letter to the Romans  
Reminded me of a story I once read,  
That tells of another beloved stuffed animal.  
Maybe you've heard it.

THERE was once a velveteen rabbit,  
and in the beginning he was really splendid.  
He had a brown and white spotted coat.  
and whiskers,  
and ears lined with pink satin.  
He was a Christmas present for a little boy.

For a long time the rabbit lived in the toy box,  
and no one thought very much about him.  
He was naturally shy,  
and some of the more expensive toys snubbed him.  
The only other toy who was kind to him was the Skin Horse.

The Skin Horse had lived in the nursery a very long time.  
He was so old that his coat was bald in patches,  
and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out.  
But he was wise,  
and he had seen several generations of new toys arrive,  
all shiny and impressive,  
only to break or grow obsolete.

He knew they were only toys,  
and would never turn into anything else.  
They would never be real.

One day the rabbit asked him, "What is REAL?"  
"Does it mean having things that buzz inside you or light up?"  
"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse.  
"It's a thing that happens to you.  
When a child loves you for a long, long time,  
not just to play with, but REALLY loves you,  
then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.  
"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse,  
"But when you're Real, you don't mind being hurt a little.

"Does it happen all at once, "the rabbit asked,  
"or bit by bit?"  
The horse said it took a long time.  
Generally, by the time you're Real,  
most of your hair has been loved off,  
and your eyes drop out  
and you get very shabby.

But these things don't matter,  
because once you are Real  
you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.  
And once you're real, you can never be unreal again.  
It lasts forever.”

The Rabbit sighed.  
He wanted to become Real,  
but he didn't want to have all those other  
uncomfortable things happen to him.  
Who wants to be shabby?

A lot of time passed,  
and not much happened to the rabbit.  
But one day,  
the mother handed the rabbit to the boy,  
just to make him stop crying,  
and after that,  
the boy always seemed to want the rabbit.  
The rabbit became the boy's constant companion.

Sure enough, the rabbit grew shabbier and shabbier  
but the boy loved him.  
And when the boy got very sick –  
so sick he almost died –  
the rabbit stayed by his side through it all.

But when the boy finally started to get better  
it was decided that the rabbit had to go.  
The rabbit had absorbed too many germs,  
and couldn't be disinfected.

This made the rabbit very sad.  
He was wishing he'd never allowed himself to love  
and be loved like that.  
If only he'd just stayed in his toy box.  
He was so sad, he cried a real tear.

And then the most wonderful thing happened.  
 Out of his tear came magic  
 that transformed him into a REAL rabbit.  
 A rabbit that could jump and play and run  
 and bask in the sunshine.  
 Before that, he thought he knew what it meant to be real.  
 But he discovered he didn't know the half of it.  
 There's real, and then there's REAL.

This story I've just told you is a very famous story.  
 It's from a children's book, called *The Velveteen Rabbit*,  
 Written by Margery Williams in 1922.  
 What a wonderful way to share a timeless truth.

Paul probably didn't have a stuffed bunny to love.  
 So he said it like this:  
 "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...  
 And we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.  
 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings,  
 knowing that suffering produces endurance,  
 and endurance produces character,  
 and character produces hope,  
 and hope does not disappoint us,  
 because God's love has been poured into our hearts  
 through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. "

That's what Jesus, too, was saying in this morning's gospel:  
 "I still have many things to say to you,  
 but you cannot bear them now.  
 When the Spirit of truth comes,  
 the spirit will guide you into all the truth."

We can't bear everything all at once.  
 But slowly, over time, things are revealed to us.  
 Slowly, over time, we begin to understand  
 what it means to be real,  
 what it means to be a child of God.

Suffering produces endurance.  
Endurance produces character.  
Character makes you real.  
But our hope is for something far more precious still.

Christian faith is not a sprint.  
It is a marathon.  
And over time, the momentary afflictions of life don't throw you,  
because you focus on what matters.

And what matters is our hope in Jesus Christ.  
And Jesus Christ will never disappoint.  
In Jesus Christ, we become REAL.

The strains and frictions of life  
simply help us grow stronger.  
They build our character.  
They help give us power, resilience, fortitude.

Having characteristics such as these  
is what's required to live without complaint,  
But we can only do this  
if we develop an abiding sense  
of the presence of God.

The more we cooperate with the reality of God in our lives,  
especially during times of trouble,  
the stronger our hope and our faith become.

Then a marvelous thing happens:  
We have the ability to hold our heads high,  
no matter what comes our way.  
Even in the midst of life's storms,  
we know that all will be well,  
because we are convinced of the utter love of God.

We feel God's warm love throughout our bodies,  
Because God so powerfully and graciously  
gave us the Holy Spirit  
to fill our hearts with love.

This same God lets us walk confidently  
through the joys and sorrows of life ,  
knowing Jesus is beside us to help us our cross.

God, as a community of persons, the Trinity,  
Assures us that we can love  
and be loved  
no matter what the circumstances.  
Amen.