

Phillip's Story

Phillip was an eight-year-old boy who had Down's syndrome. He was a very happy child, but he was becoming increasingly aware that he was different. He had been baptized and went to religious education classes with other eight-year-olds and a teacher named John. John was creative, and he helped the class members to laugh, to share, and to care about one another.

Phillip was not readily part of the group because of his differences. He didn't say much. He didn't want to be different, and he didn't choose to be different, but he was. He knew it, and so did the other children.

John had a marvelous lesson planned for his class on the Sunday after Easter. John collected ten plastic eggs—one for each child—and brought them to class.

It was a beautiful spring day. The assigned task was for each child to go out on the church grounds and look for a symbol of new life to place into his or her egg and to share with the others in the class.

The children all ran around collecting symbols and putting them into the eggs. They returned to the classroom and put all the eggs on a table. Then John gathered the children around the table and began to open the eggs. He opened one and found a flower. He opened another and found a butterfly. Another held a new leaf from a tree. Still another had a rock in it.

John opened one egg that had nothing in it. Some of the children said, "That's stupid!" Others said, "That's not fair!" And still others said, "Someone didn't do it right." That's when John felt a tug on his shirt. He looked down to see Phillip standing beside him. Phillip said excitedly: "It's mine! It's mine!"

One of the children said: "There's nothing there. You never do anything right, Phillip."

"I did too do it right!" Phillip exclaimed. "It's Easter, and the tomb is empty."

The class was silent—the silence was full and deep. A miracle happened that spring day. From that day on, Phillip was a part of the class. He had been set free from the tomb of his differentness.

Later that summer Phillip died. His family had known that he would not live a long life. Many things had been wrong with his little body, and he had been sick often.

On the day of the funeral, nine children and their teacher marched up to the altar, not with flowers to cover the stark reality of death. Nine eight-year-olds and their teacher marched up to that altar and laid on it an empty egg. And they prayed that Phillip's tomb might also be empty.

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