

The Day Philip Joined the Group

He was 9—in a Sunday school class of 8 year-olds.

Eight-year-olds can be cruel.

The third-graders did not welcome Philip to their group. Not just because he was older. He was “different.”

He suffered from Down’s syndrome and its obvious manifestations: facial characteristics, slow responses, symptoms of retardation.

One Sunday after Easter the Sunday school teacher gathered some of those plastic eggs that pull apart in the middle—the kind in which some ladies’ pantyhose are packaged.

The Sunday school teacher gave one of these plastic eggs to each child.

On that beautiful spring day each child was to go outdoors and discover for himself some symbol of “new life” and place that symbolic seed or leaf or whatever inside his egg.

They would then open their eggs one by one, and each youngster would explain how his find was a symbol of “new life.”

So...

The youngsters gathered ‘round on the appointed day and put their eggs on a table, and the teacher began to open them.

One child had found a flower.

All the children “oohed” and “aahed” at the lovely symbol of new life.

In another was a butterfly. “Beautiful,” the girls said. And it’s not easy for an 8-year-old to say “beautiful.”

Another egg was opened to reveal a rock. Some of the children laughed.

“That’s crazy!” one said. “How’s a rock supposed to be like a ‘new life’?”

Immediately a little boy spoke up and said, “That’s mine. I knew everybody would get flowers and leaves and butterflies and all that stuff, so I got a rock to be different.”

Everyone laughed.

The teacher opened the last one, and there was nothing inside.

“That’s not fair,” someone said. “That’s stupid,” said another.

Teacher felt a tug on his shirt. It was Philip. Looking up he said, “It’s mine. I did do it. It’s empty. **I have new life because the tomb is empty.**”

The class fell silent.

From that day on Philip became part of the group. They welcomed him. Whatever had made him different was never mentioned again.

Philip’s family had known he would not live a long life; just too many things wrong with the tiny body. That summer, overcome with infection, Philip died.

On the day of his funeral nine 8-year-old boys and girls confronted the reality of death and marched up to the altar—not with flowers.

Nine children with their Sunday school teacher placed on the casket of their friend their gift of love—an empty egg.