

“Funny Viewpoints”

First Corinthians 1: 18-25; John 20: 19-31

Today is Bright Sunday. It is something our churches have been doing for the last couple of years. I believe it is also called Joke Sunday. The idea of this day is that the joy of Easter continues to be celebrated, and even celebrated with humor. I didn't make it up myself—it dates back a long time.

One of the basic ideas is that God raising Jesus from the dead—what is called the Resurrection—is a great big joke on the devil! So ha, ha, ha Satan, Jesus did not stay dead. He became alive again.

With that in mind, let's consider some more things about Easter that are funny.

For one thing, how about the date of Easter. “Do you know how the date for Easter was set?” . . . “Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. Obviously, that was the work of a committee.” (by Jeanne and Owen Welles)

As far as the date goes, this year Easter fell on April 12, which was my late father's birthday. One thing about him was that when it came to the use of electricity in our house, he was kind of a miser. So, all day on Easter Sunday, whenever I would turn off a light, I would add “Happy Birthday, Dad.” Any other dads, or even moms, like that?

Here is another one. “Easter means that you can put truth in a grave, but it won't stay there.” (Clarence W. Hull)

Even one of the really big theological guns, Tertullian of the second century had this to say about the Resurrection: “It is by all means to be believed . . .because it is absurd.”

To get a little more into a worshipful theme, let's have just one more quote—“Easter is the morning when the Lord laughs out loud, laughs at all the things that snuff out joy, all the things that pretend to be all-0powerful, like cruelty and madness and despair and evil, and most especially, that great pretended, death. Jesus sweeps them away with His wonderful resurrection laughter.” (Rev. Frank Yates)

Isn't that a great way to look at Easter?

If we think about it, almost everything about the Christian faith has more than one way to look at it. We can think of the Resurrection of Jesus as a wonderful miracle, and/or a wonderful joke, or even a way to open our minds and hearts to God, in ways we would never have imagined.

The story of Thomas, the disciple, in the Scripture less from John, is one that can be taken different ways.

The traditional way is to call this whole episode the story of “Doubting Thomas.” Thomas would not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead and come to the other ten disciples, who were behind locked doors., with Thomas absent from that occasion.

Thomas even got a bit snippy about it. He said, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my fingers in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

So, of course, one week later, Jesus came back and showed the wounds, even using Thomas’s own words right back to him. And Thomas believed, and believed solidly.

Jesus also made the comment, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” We are the people Jesus was referring to when he said this.

No, we didn’t get the up close and personal experiences with the Risen Jesus Christ, the same way those disciples in Israel did. But we are blessed with faith and belief anyway. Hallelujah!

But, there are other people who see Thomas much differently, people who think of Thomas as a very good disciple.

[Sometimes] “Thomas is viewed as a poor example, as one who doubted while the other apostles believed. You must remember, though, that the other disciples gathered in that room had experienced the presence of our Lord. Thomas was simply requesting the privilege of seeing what his fearful brothers had already seen. He is not doubting Jesus, you see, but the testimony of his cowardly disciples could hardly be taken at face value, now could it?”

For us, Saint Thomas was the only one among the disciples who was not so filled with fear that he was unwilling to leave the disciples' hiding place. . . .We might better call him Fearless Thomas than Thomas the Doubter.

For us, Saint Thomas is the disciple who was honest enough to express his doubts to his brothers and his faith to the Lord. We believe that Jesus rewarded this honesty by showing Thomas his hands, feet, and side. He even offered them to Thomas to touch, though the Bible does not say that Thomas actually touched his Lord. His reward was the simple offering by Jesus of his wounds. Is this not greater proof, even more so than signs, miracles, or teachings that Jesus is, indeed, the chosen one of God? Our Lord offers the evidence of his wounds suffered for Thomas in his doubt, suffered for the other disciples in their fear, and suffered for us who live in doubt and fear much of the time.

So, you see, for us Thomas is truly a saint, a man of faith who planted a seed of holiness in our hearts. I now ask you, Could a doubter such as what you believe Thomas to be do that? Or perhaps doubt such as what Thomas expressed is part of the fabric of our faith. Without a measure of holy doubt we would fall victim to those unscrupulous people who would take advantage of our gullibility for their profit. . . .there are many such on television programs. . . .Perhaps such fearless, honest, doubting faith is the weft that adds color and interesting patterns to the theology that provides the warp of our faith.

Thomas's story puts us on trial, my friend, not him. The apostle's fearlessness and honesty raises the question, "Could I say 'My Lord and my God' when I see Christ's wounds wherever they appear in my world?"

(Story by Michael E. Williams, in Storyteller's Companion to the Bible, John, volume 10)

Now, in our other Scripture less, in First Corinthians, the writer of it himself, St. Paul, gets very specific about the different ways to understand Jesus' crucifixion, death and Resurrection. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God."

Foolishness, as I take St. Paul's meaning here, is something that does not make any sense. For some people, those who did not believe, Jesus' death seemed too miserable and tragic to accept. For the Jewish people, expecting a Messiah to fix

things, Jesus' death made it seem that Jesus could not have been the Messiah. For people wanting wisdom and reason and rhetoric (and the Greeks of that time were terrific in those areas) what happened to Jesus was not logical.

That is because belief in Jesus is a gift from God's power. It is not purely a matter of expectations or forensic debate. Those things have their places, but faith is a matter of the soul and the spirit, as well as the mind. Faith in Jesus also entails a real relationship with him.

Jesus is our Lord and our Savior, so we trust him and obey him, and we are saved by him. Jesus is our Friend, our Guide, our Hope.

Maybe our situation right now could be called foolish, in the way Saint Paul wrote. We are in an emergency, the corona virus pandemic. And we would just love to get up on Sunday morning, or evening, and go to church.

Sleeping in, or staying at home to watch TV, are not as appealing as getting to go to a beautiful house of worship, and see others who are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are longing for God, and we are longing to worship God in the 'go-to-meeting' way.

We can't. For good reason, we have to stay apart and stay home, until the crisis ends. So, here we are at our screens, worshipping God. Some of us are still in our jammies, or muddy garden-work clothes. Some of us have coffee, or breakfast, or popcorn handy, while we watch this service and worship.

And, maybe God is smiling upon us, as we worship this way. God is happy that we are doing this, even though it is so different than the usual way. Maybe, just maybe, God is laughing with joy and delight, because we believe without the experiences which Thomas and the other disciples had, and because we don't mind what could be called foolishness, but is really salvation and hope and strength. Amen.

(Jokes from *Holy Humor*, by Cal and Rose Samra.)

Presented by Reverend Sally J. DeMasters, April 19, 2020.