

Acts 10: 34-43

John 20: 1-18

### Being “Fools”

(link for children’s story <https://vimeo.com/83818579>)

Easter and April Fools! How can I resist? Did you know that “it was once customary for even the most dry and solemn of preachers to begin the Easter homily with a joke?”<sup>1</sup>

I thought that if I took that permission, I’d get carried away or possibly offend if I went with my jokes this morning. So I’ll just tell you an amusing story. One Easter afternoon my family was out for a walk and we passed my sister’s neighbour working in his yard. She told us quietly that his name was Jesus! My brother and I couldn’t let that one go, we spent the whole rest of that walk figuring out how best to greet him: “Hey, Jesus, how did you sleep last night?” “Good morning, Jesus, I see you’re up early.” “Find any eggs in your yard?” “Bunnies get your garden?” And so on and so forth. I guess you had to be there.

Some churches to this day have a Holy Humour Sunday, after Easter. “Laughter Sunday (also known as Holy Humour Sunday, Hilarity Sunday, God’s Laughter Sunday, Holy Fools Sunday) has its roots in a number of different Christian traditions. Churches in 15th century Bavaria used to celebrate the Sunday after Easter as *Risus Paschalis* (‘God’s Joke,’ or ‘the Easter laugh’). Priests would deliberately include amusing stories and jokes in their sermons in an attempt to make the faithful laugh. After the service, people would gather together to play practical jokes on one another and to tell funny stories. It was their way of celebrating the resurrection of Christ – the supreme joke God played on Satan by raising Jesus from the dead.

The observance of *Risus Paschalis* was officially outlawed by Pope Clement X in the 17th century.”<sup>2</sup> But I have colleagues who do celebrate Holy Humour Sunday nowadays.

So I was thinking about jokes and realized that there are some things in life that if you try to explain them, you end up ruining them. You lose something about what is

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<sup>1</sup> “God has Given Me Cause to Laugh” Toward a Theology of Humor, Paul Thigpen [http://www.paulthigpen.com/?page\\_id=839](http://www.paulthigpen.com/?page_id=839)

<sup>2</sup> Christine Longhurst, <https://re-worship.blogspot.ca/2011/03/laughter-sunday.html>

<sup>3</sup> Writer Ched Meyers thinks that there was more going on than tending to a body. He believes that “this narrative breathes of a

<sup>2</sup> Christine Longhurst, <https://re-worship.blogspot.ca/2011/03/laughter-sunday.html>

wonderful about these stories in the first place. How many times have you told a funny story and had to end like I did “Yeah, I guess you had to be there?”

Jokes are especially like that. If you have to explain them, they are pretty much ruined. They need to be grasped in language, feeling, nuance, relationship, context and sometimes in time and perspective. You don’t always get the joke when you first hear it. For example, it took me until just recently to realize that the classic joke “Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side” was more than a joke with a nonsense ending. It’s a pun about the chicken getting run over and crossing to the other side. (“The other side” is another way of saying death). Get it? See? You can’t explain it, it gets ruined.

This year I’m thinking that the Resurrection of Jesus is another one of those experiences that wilts under too much scrutiny. God’s cosmic joke of Jesus going to the other side – see what I did there? ☺ - God’s surprise ending, unexpected turn of events, tada! in the face of the world’s evil. It’s amazing! Powerful! Explanations and speculations can take all the life out of it, so to speak.

Or not. I happen to like theology almost as much as I like jokes. If you are in the mood for explanations about the resurrection, I can commend to you a recent article in the Canadian Mennonite magazine entitled: *Is belief in Jesus’ Resurrection Necessary?* An interesting observation from that article is that even in the Bible, everyone reacts differently to the experience of the empty tomb. Probably some – who didn’t go on record – found it way too much to grasp, some connected the dots to what Jesus had told them right away, some were very skeptical, some needed to see it for themselves, some began to extrapolate theologically.

This year when I heard the story of Mary Magdalene I felt great sympathy with her for not being believed. (BTW, Pope Francis just raised her status to “Apostle to the apostles” in 2016.) It is still all too common for women’s experiences to be doubted until someone with more presumed authority can confirm them. Or for them to be assigned a domestic role with no nuance. Yes, she went to tend to Jesus’ body with spices. Maybe we could also consider that Mary may have had political reasons to be checking up on the tomb and reporting back to the disciples.<sup>3</sup> Women’s movements at the time would have been inconspicuous. Maybe she showed great courage instead of only practicality and sentiment on that morning. Maybe that’s why I don’t feel like explaining Mary’s experience of the resurrection, I just want to accept it as told, to believe it and to ponder.

I invite you to ponder as well. Among the things to ponder is how Jesus treats her when they meet in this scene we just heard. In my reading of it, I love how he kind of teases her in the garden, brings her from tears to laughter. “Hello, Mary, it’s me,

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<sup>3</sup> Writer Ched Meyers thinks that there was more going on than tending to a body. He believes that “this narrative breathes of a quiet conspiracy of refusal and resistance—not to mention of compassionate solidarity with the executed.”  
<https://www.chedmyers.org/blog/2017/04/16/women-authorities-and-jesus%E2%80%99-body-easter-reflection-mt-2755-2815-ched-myers>

Jesus!" And she gets excited because he has to tell her not to embrace him. To me it speaks to Jesus' tenderness with his friend, and to Jesus' sense of humour. I imagine a twinkle in his eye when he says her name.

It is common in church circles to think that the first thing to do with people's experiences with God -- especially the ones in the Bible -- is to run them through a checklist of credibility, plausibility, theological integrity, etc. etc. I know this temptation. I am tempted to do that as well.

So let's test ourselves, I'll tell you a true story and see how you react inside.

Once, when John Epp and I were driving back from the TUMC Retreat we stopped for ice cream. As we sat there, in walked a young man and an older woman, it looked like she could be his mom. He had a long beard, a black T-shirt with crosses all over it and elaborate tattoos of crosses on both his arms. It could have been heavy metal-ish, but something about him caught my eye; it looked religious to this here pastor.

They spoke to the owner of the store in another language the whole time. Maybe Greek? (This here pastor did not take Greek in Seminary). John, who knows biblical Greek very well indeed, was apparently too interested in his ice cream cone! As we were all leaving the store together they said goodbye to the owner with the following words: *Christos Anesti!* (Alithos Anesti) Aha! It was Greek -- Christ is Risen! What a curious way to say goodbye.

I couldn't leave it alone so I let them know that we recognized what they had said. "You said Christ is risen!" "Yes I did!", he responded. I don't remember his name, let's call him Theo -- became very excited and immediately started to tell us all about how he wanted to become a priest in the Greek Orthodox tradition. That certainly explained the beard. But why a priest in the Orthodox tradition? Here's what had happened to him. He explained that he had been languishing in his basement for a long time, smoking weed and playing videogames -- that is not an uncommon scenario these days, I assure you. His mom didn't know what to do anymore -- also not an uncommon scenario -- so she prayed. And she prayed, and she prayed. Then, at some point, nothing earth shattering, with no warning Theo had a mystical experience. He saw the resurrected Christ who spoke to him and invited him to a new life. Just like that. Theo came out of that basement and he was a new man. His own resurrection, as it were.

His mom was beaming beside him, he was filled with hope and witnessing genuinely to the power of his and of Christ's resurrection!

There you have it. What do you do with a story like that? You accept it. You praise God for his transformation. Maybe you scratch your head or maybe you smile to yourself. Maybe you wonder about how new life would be for you.

We Christians here in 2018 are standing on the shoulders of many, many people and their experiences and perspectives, preserving the stories, testifying to God's power in their lives and to the significance of Jesus coming back from the dead. If the first disciples had not had that experience, and if they had not believed it or lived into it, or been empowered by the Holy Spirit – it is doubtful we'd be here doing all this today. It is doubtful we'd still gather in the hope of defeating the darkness of our own world. But that is what we're doing!

Christians have been considered fools for this celebration, in fact the apostle Paul embraced that title – fool for Christ. So I would remind you that in times of darkness it is often the fools, the jesters who speak truth to power, who challenge the ways the powerful and try to shape the narrative to where it brings hope. Be a fool!

In the spirit of Holy Humour, *Risus Paschalis* I'd like to end by showing you some images from a project out of Australia called *Jesus Laughing and Loving*. Instead of the usual somber depictions of Jesus, it invited artists from around the world to show Jesus smiling! Here's how they explain their project: "God is love. We can only practice love in community. Jesus said "where two or three are gathered in my name I am there" – a living presence, not a historical figure!... When do we feel most loved and loving?... in groups where there is laughter and care. Laughter binds – always has, always will."

( the projection was unsuccessful – see link: <http://www.miat.org.au/jesus-laughing-exhibtion.php> the picture referenced is called Fishing Expedition )

***Christos Anesti!*** (Alithos Anesti)