

April 1, 2018

Easter B – April Fool’s Day

Isaiah 25: 6-9

Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24

Acts 10: 34-43

Mark 16: 1-8

Alleluia!! Christ is Risen!! The Lord is Risen Indeed!! Alleluia!!

Chocolate has been declared illegal!!! **APRIL FOOL!!** We’re giving out hundred dollar bills this morning!! **APRIL FOOL!!**

I thought that April Fool’s Day was a good place to begin our celebration of Easter, the ultimate celebration of expectations turned upside down. Jesus, crucified, dead and buried, has risen in glory!!! Not a joke, not an illusion, but real salvation, given to us in love!! The last time April Fool’s Day was on Easter Sunday, I was 3 years old. I don’t remember. My teenage sisters were surely tricking each other all day long!

The best sources say that April Fool’s Day was the culmination of a New Year’s celebration when the ancient new year began at the vernal equinox, the turning of time from winter to spring (*on about March 21*).ⁱ Another source says that when they changed the start of

the new year from Spring to January 1 in the winter, the people who refused to go along with the change were called “April Fools”.

These days, April First is just a day when we try to trick one another, to play pranks, to make fools of one another. I read a lot of good April Fool Pranks on line, including an Easter Egg Hunt where no eggs were hidden. There was one where the little chocolate eggs, the ones in shiny foil, were replaced with grapes.

How you feel about April Fool’s pranks depends on your role. If you are the one who thought up the trick; you’re excited to see if the fool will fall for it. If you are the fool, you feel ridiculous and maybe a bit angry. The word “Fool” is not very flattering. The first definition is one who acts unwisely, a silly person.” The synonyms are worse – idiot, imbecile, blockhead and some really bad ones! Another definition referred to the historical “fool” in a king’s court, a jester, poking fun at the powerful. Easter plays into both those definitions. Fools and foolishness turn up all through the Bible. Proverbs uses foolishness as the opposite of wisdom. *The wise are guided by God and do this. On the other hand, the fool does that.* To be called a fool was a very serious insult.

God's people in the Bible sometimes thought God was making fools of them. The prophet, Jeremiah, had just been publicly humiliated and was clearly feeling like a fool when he raged at the LORD: **“O Lord, you have enticed me...; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughing-stock all day long; everyone mocks me.”** (20:7) God told Ezekiel to lie on one side in public for 430 days! Or, think about those really old women in the Bible who suddenly find out they are going to have a baby, like Sarah, – that seems like a prank. One of those babies was even named “Laughter”, because Sarah thought it was so funny.

Fools are in the New Testament, too. In the story of Jesus arrest, torture and suffering death on the cross; we hear some of the frustration and foolishness that must have haunted Jesus' followers during that week in Jerusalem. These men and women were ardent followers of this miracle worker, a miracle worker with words of wisdom and stories that could surprise and confound his opponents. They had come to believe that he might save them, and they welcomed him to Jerusalem with loud shouts and songs, with palm branches and robes thrown on the ground for his donkey to walk on.

By the end of the week, they realized they were wrong. Jesus was had been killed by the authorities. They had hoped in vain. They were fools to believe that things would change. They thought they were dead wrong. They thought they had been on a fool's errand, searching for a Savior, tricked into following this man from Galilee who was surely at least a wise teacher and a good magician. They went out looking for a Savior and ended up at the Cross. They surely felt foolish, betrayed, and, probably, very angry. It is not a comfortable feeling, this combination of embarrassment, humiliation and foolishness.

I read a children's book called Peter's First Easter.ⁱⁱ The disciple, Peter, seems a good model for today. Stories in the Bible portray Peter as one of Jesus' closest friends, but also as a man given to foolish words and actions. Peter denied even knowing Jesus, in the night before Jesus' death. He slept in the garden the night before that; although Jesus had asked him to stay awake. He was nowhere near when Jesus died on the cross. In this book, when Sunday morning comes, and Mary Magdalene is banging on the door, Peter is afraid and tells her to keep quiet. Mary recognizes his foolishness, because she knows the truth, **Jesus lives!!!** She says,

Peter, you donkey, come out, come see!!!! There was an angel and the tomb was empty!!! He followed her to the empty tomb and saw for himself. Mary reminded him of Jesus promise to rise on the third day. Peter ran back and locked himself in his room. He said: “Mary was a fool, and I was scared, because if our enemies would steal the body of Jesus, they would surely kill us too.” Peter later learned the truth that Mary had understood immediately.

Like Peter, **in our human limitations, we can all be made fools.** Today, at that confluence of Easter and April Fool’s Day, we remember how much we need God’s presence in our lives. We gratefully accept Jesus as our victorious Savior. Mark Twain probably said it best: *“April 1st: This is the day upon which we are reminded of what we are on the other three-hundred and sixty-four.”* At Easter, we celebrate that God made a way for us to live beyond our human limits. God takes us to eternal and abundant life, starting NOW!!!

As human beings living in a fallen world, we are all fools. Chaplain Sam Portaro reminds us that: *“It is especially important ..that we acknowledge the foolishness of it all. For this story of our own seeking after power—and the death of the innocent Jesus who*

placed himself in the midst of it—reveals the folly of our own seriousness, the folly and waste of our own designs. It is the story that begins in Genesis with our own search for power, our first step in the longest-running, most devastatingly hurtful fool’s errand ever undertaken...What is Easter, if not the embarrassing but redeeming news that we are fools, April fools, and the invitation to rejoice that neither our foolishness nor our embarrassment is ultimately fatal?”

We take heart this morning as we remember that God created us in love and, through millennia, loved us in our human foolishness. We never know enough, we never love enough, we never care enough to grasp the grace of God in the abundance that it is offered. We will never on this earth, in this human life, achieve the perfect life that God created us to have. We see in the cross how foolish and fallen we are. Yet, Jesus died and rose again, so that we might live!!!

Today is Easter, when we hear the Good News!!! We were not pranked, we were not tricked. Jesus lives. God made a way to bring Jesus out of death into life AND God made way for us to follow. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God made way for us to be reconciled and restored to our original relationship with God. Our sins were taken the cross with Jesus, the sins of the whole

world, and they were removed, cleansed, covered, mysteriously and miraculously gone from our permanent record. In a surprise move, Jesus returned from the tomb with the intention of restoring the world to God's original Kingdom plan.

The Good News, beloved, is this: God's ways are not our ways. What Jesus did, What God did, is far beyond all we could ask for or imagine. In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul reminds us: **If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.** (1 Cor 3: 18-19)

A Christian songwriter, Michael Card, wrote a song based on that Bible verse. The chorus goes like this:

*When we in our foolishness thought we were wise,
He played the fool and He opened our eyes.
When we in our weakness believed we were strong,
He became helpless to show we were wrong.
And so we follow God's own fool,
For only the foolish can tell.
Believe the unbelievable,
Come be a fool as well.ⁱⁱⁱ*

What seems right to us, to common sense, to our experience, none of that fits into the wisdom of God. What could be a more foolish story in the world's eyes than that God would leave heaven,

take on a human form, a body; give up his majesty and power to live among us, subject to the principalities and powers of the world. That God would willingly endure humiliation, torture, and death to redeem a people that time and time again-before and after his death -- rejected his authority and turned away from his everlastingly, abundant love. That God would break the power of sin and death, rising from the dead and making it possible for us to rise again, too. That is the foolish story we claim. Some years, we sing the Easter song – Because He Lives. It tells us that because Jesus Rose from the dead, we can face life with joy and hope and love. We can set aside fear of want, of suffering, of all the terrors of this world. Because he lives, and all our tomorrows are changed by that fact. This story is the TRUTH that changes everything.

That is the Easter story we proclaim this morning. That God has done, is doing and will do things beyond our imagination. We believe *that through faith in the crucified and risen Christ, we receive forgiveness of our sins, the gift of eternal life and communion with God. Jesus overcame our two great enemies, sin and death, and is called the pioneer of our salvation.*^{iv} It's not a joke, it is true. Jesus Lives!!! Christ is Risen!!! We are saved from our foolish ways and

given a new start, new hope, fresh grace and love and joy to carry us through today, tomorrow and forever. Thanks be to God! Alleluia!

I leave you with the words of Archbishop Fulton Sheen, one of the first radio and TV evangelists: **...to be a Fool for Christ is the greatest compliment the world can give.**

ⁱ Sam Portero, Daysprings, Cowley Publishing, 2001, p. 120-21. I am indebted to this meditation for the April Fool's theme.

ⁱⁱ Walter Wangerin Jr. Zondervan Publishing House.

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Card, God's Own Fool, p. 203 in Immanuel: Reflections on the Life of Christ

^{iv} P. 31 Questions on the Way, Beverley D. Tucker and William H. Swatos, Jr. , Forward Movement.