

Easter Sunday
April 1, 2018
"April Fool!"

John 20: 1-18, *New International Version*

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!"
And she told them that he had said these things to her.

It is Easter Sunday, and it's also April Fools Day. I can't let such a great theme go to waste!

Today I really wanted to start the sermon with a play. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus would come in, carrying Jesus' lifeless body. The faithful women would follow. Together, they would wrap his body in linens and seal him in the tomb. After some crying and hugging each other, they would leave. After a minute, the stone in front of the tomb would slowly roll aside...and Jesus would hop out and shout, "April Fools!"

Well...that was a little impractical. So here are some other classic April Fools pranks. The onion with a stick in it, dipped in caramel and served to some unsuspecting victim as a caramel apple. The paper cut-out bug affixed to the inside of a lampshade. Your spouse or child turns the lamp on? Instant laughs!

Or there is the classic one pulled off by the BBC in 1957. They broadcasted a short documentary about Swiss farmers harvesting freshly grown spaghetti. People actually contacted the station, wondering where to get the plants.

Other public entities have also joined this bandwagon. In 1996, Taco Bell announced on April 1 that it had purchased Philadelphia's Liberty Bell, and planned to rename it the Taco Liberty Bell. In 1998, Burger King advertised a "Left-Handed Whopper." People actually tried to buy the bogus burger.

April Fools Day may go all the way back to 1582, the year France switched from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar. Those who celebrated the new year on April 1, according to the old, Gregorian calendar, became the butt of jokes and tricks. Instead of being called an "April Fool" though, they were "*poisson d'avril*," an "April Fish." This came from the idea that a easily caught fish was similar to a gullible person.

But however it got started, this is Easter, the most holy day in the Christian calendar. Since it falls on April Fools day, it's appropriate to ask: "Who, in the Easter story, is the April Fool?" There are quite a few candidates.

It could be Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. He blinked when confronted by the Jewish leaders, caving to their demands. He knew Jesus was innocent, but washed his hands of it, sending Jesus off to the cross in the name of the Roman emperor. But then, Jesus didn't obey the emperor by staying dead. April Fool!

Or the April Fool is the Sanhedrin. They plotted and schemed to get rid of Jesus, desperate to maintain their power. They violated their own rules to accomplish it. They accused and lied

about an innocent man. They colluded with Pilate and the Roman government to see Jesus dead. And after all that trouble, Jesus just popped up again like a Whack-a-Mole! April Fool!

Maybe the April Fool is the disciples. Let's face it, they must have felt pretty foolish as Jesus was led off to death. They had given up their jobs to follow him. They had left home and family to hang out in his posse. They had walked hundreds of miles, seemingly for nothing. They had put their hopes and dreams in someone they thought would free them from Roman oppression, only to be disappointed. So they went home, abandoning their friend. But wait! April Fool!

Or it could be Peter, in particular. He began enthusiastically enough. He defended Jesus to others. He was the one who saw that his rabbi was "the Messiah, the son of the living God." (Matthew 16: 16) He promised Jesus to never abandon him. He even picked a fight with the Roman soldiers who came to arrest Jesus, cutting off someone's ear. But then Peter lost his faith as fast as he sank in the Sea of Galilee. As Jesus faced trial and persecution, Peter denied ever knowing him. What a fool...an April Fool!

As long as we're examining individual disciples, what about Thomas? He thought he was so clever. He saw himself as a keen observer of the world, and loved to understand how things worked. When Jesus told the disciples that he went "to prepare a place" for them (John 14: 3), it was Thomas who replied, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" He was skeptical even after the event, saying "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." (John 20: 25) What do you have to say now, Thomas? April Fool!

Or perhaps the biggest fool of all is Jesus himself. He is the one, after all, who called Satan's bluff in the biggest joke of all time.

You could say Jesus acted in foolish ways throughout his ministry. He rejected a comfortable lifestyle as a village carpenter, for a peripatetic wandering all over ancient Israel. He looked to the lowest of the low for friends—the tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, fishermen, the poor and needy. For followers, he chose the least qualified and respected people around. He disregarded a rich young man who could have given his ministry a much-needed financial boost, telling the man to give his money to the poor. He refused to cater to the Jewish leaders, even openly defied them—and even when they had the power to kill him.

He spoke truth, even when it got him in trouble. He called a hypocrite and hypocrite. He chose weakness instead of strength, vulnerability instead of force, faithfulness instead of practicality, honesty instead of influence peddling.

And when his enemies thought he was dead, when the powers of this world thought they had won, when the grave rose up to consume him—he was the Fool of Easter, the trickster, the cheater of the tomb!

Today, Easter Fools Day, we remember that:

...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. For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

1 Corinthians 1: 18-25

What about us? Where are we in this array of April Fools?

We are fools if we fail to recognize or believe what God can do—that through him death becomes life, darkness becomes light, sin becomes forgiveness, grief becomes joy, and tragedy becomes redemption.

Or maybe we are fools—fools for Christ! Sometimes, the world thinks we’re fools when we join him in his ministry of choosing faithfulness, weakness, vulnerability, and honesty; when we love our neighbor and pray for those who persecute us; when we spend ourselves and our resources caring for those that Jesus loves.

I would rather be a fool for Christ than a scholar of the ways of the world, human ways of greed, selfishness, violence, jealousy, and hate.

It is because of this day, because of Jesus’ sacrifice for us, his death, and his rising again, that we will never be slaves to that way of life. Praise God, that our sin will never define us; our brokenness will never have the last word in our lives. Because of this day, those who hope in the Lord will also rise, and:

...will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 40: 31

Thanks be to God, who gives us this victory through Jesus Christ...

References:

“The April Fool.”

http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/btl_display.asp?installment_id=93041097