

Easter Sunday (April 12, 2020)

Text: Matthew 28:1-10

“Easter Laughter”

We have been deprived the opportunity to come through the solemn Triduum — the three days.

On Maundy Thursday, we didn't get to gather with solemnity in the Upper Room ... where with brooding wonder we could have watched as Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, wondering what that might mean for how we are to live our lives. Nor did we sit at table with Jesus as the rubrics of the Last Supper unfolded, and ate and drank with wondering hearts at what this could mean for our faith. There was no walk with Jesus to Gethsemane, to view Him in the throes of depression and anxiety, as He prayed with such earnestness to His Father, that He began to sweat blood. We were spared the scene where we looked on in dismay as Judas arrived with his band of soldiers and Temple guards to begin the arrest process, after all His disciples fled in fear to escape the fate that they suddenly realized would, in fact, befall Him.

On Good Friday, the solemnity should have become intense as we looked on at the kangaroo court that had been assembled by the Sanhedrin, as witness after witness committed outright perjury to arrive at the preconceived outcome of condemning a man who had become a perceived threat to the status quo. We didn't get to engorge ourselves with disgust as we observed the machinations by which they maneuvered Pontius Pilate into going along with their design, all the while trying to make it appear that justice was being served. We didn't get to gather with the pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the High Holy Days, or weep as we watched Jesus paraded through city streets, bearing the *stauron*, the cross piece to which His arms would be affixed. Nor were we with the followers who seemed to have regained a modicum of backbone, at least enough to reemerge at the site of His crucifixion, we looked on as indignity after indignity was visited upon Him, insult after insult thrown at Him, and the final denouement of His death

Yesterday, we did not formally keep a vigil. Yet in spirit we were with the disciples — male and female — as they processed all that had gone on, and how they were going to go forth from there. Those of us who have been through the time of mourning for a loved one know that this may well be the most difficult day of all — the day after. There is a kind of adrenaline rush that kicks in as the final events take shape — in a medical emergency like a heart attack or an auto accident there is a melee of decisions that need to be made — for one who has been nearing death over time, there is the vigil that is kept as the final hours tick away. But after that, the adrenal glands stop their furious pumping, and there is a kind of let-down in the aftermath. We call it a wake, which comes from the Old English term *wacu*, for maintaining watchfulness, but feels more like the churning, foaming path left behind by a ship, as emotions are tossed hither and yon.

So now we come to Easter. Since we haven't been part of those three days — the impact of this day is diminished. Oh, if you could risk getting to the store, there could still be the colored eggs, the marshmallow chicks, the chocolate bunnies, all neatly nestled in plastic grass. And there is the excuse to purchase and don a new outfit (although that one is pretty much lost on me; I haven't had a change in Easter outfits in over forty years). And, in this period of social distancing, we are denied the opportunity to get together with family and friends to scarf down some cured and roasted pig meat and far too many hard-boiled eggs for anybody's healthy cholesterol count.

“This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” invites the Psalmist. And we come today to be glad. We are glad. The Good News is announced today — ***“Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”*** And this news is supposed to make us glad. It does make us glad ... doesn't it? The question is: *“Why does it makes us glad?”*

Don't rush . . . think about it. There is something about this piece of news

that grabs us. We want to know that our lives are in some manner secured . . . that there is a future upon which we can rely . . . that there will be meaning and purpose to it all. The message of Easter tells us: *“Death is not the end! If you are tied to Jesus Christ, there is something beyond death. There is life unending!”* Need proof? ***“He is not here, for He has been raised . . .”***

It is joyous news. It should be news that makes us laugh out loud with joy. All the sadness we experience in the face of death — gone! All the fear that overwhelms us when we think of death — wiped away! All the questions we have about that unknown state on the other side of death — erased! Christ is risen!

I got to thinking this week — what must the Easter experience have been for Jesus? We tend to think of Easter in terms of what it means for us: We get salvation. We get deliverance from death. We get the promise of eternal life. We get the chocolate bunnies, and all the rest.

But what did it mean to Jesus? What was going on in Jesus as he appeared to the women as they hurried away from the tomb and the angels? What was He thinking? What ran through His mind as He stood on the other side of the door to that locked upper room, just before He suddenly was in the room with the disciples? What was going on inside Him as He drew near to the disciples on the Emmaus Road?

I think the image I had portrayed for me throughout my childhood was a fairly humorless Jesus. When He stood in the midst of the Twelve in the Upper Room, His face was expressionless, blasé, almost detached. There was usually a tone of sadness about His encounter with Mary Magdalene, especially when He spoke her name, with poignant pathos. And as for the Emmaus Road duo, well it was an almost beatific face that was drawn, which to me would have been a clear sign for the disciples to recognize. Of course, in all the Sunday School artwork I saw growing up, Jesus was never without a halo, which should have been a clue for anyone to pick up.

So I wonder Did Jesus giggle just before He entered that Upper Room? Was He almost at the point of guffawing when He showed Thomas His hands and side? Was He ready to bust a gusset when Mary went on and on about how they had taken His body and she didn't know where to look for it? Did He just let it go when stepped in front of the women as they hurried from the tomb? And what was the final snippet that led the two Emmaus disciples finally to recognize that it was Jesus who had been walking with them on the road and sat at table with them? Was it, as He disappeared from His sight, the sound of laughter echoing in their ears?

Where is the joy in the Easter story? Not much of it was ever communicated to me as a child ... not in Sunday School ... not at Wollaston Lutheran Day School, where I attended for five years ... not even in Lutheran colleges and seminaries. Solemnity? — yes! Joy? — hardly.

The Gospel record tells us that Jesus enjoyed life! He enjoyed it so much that His opponents used it as a charge against Him: He was described as a ***“winebibber and a glutton.”*** He hung out with a pretty rough crowd — tax collectors, harlots, fishermen — these were not people recognized for their refined airs. Like most hard-working folk, they were people who enjoyed a good laugh when they could share one . . . and tried to share them often, because in many ways life was otherwise hard. Did Jesus enjoy a joke? Maybe not Henny Youngman . . . probably not a joke that was racist or sexist . . . would Jesus have laughed at a blond joke? Maybe we cannot identify the exact kind of humor that would have cracked up Jesus, but does that mean that the man lacked a sense of humor?

I think Jesus had a wonderful sense of humor — He delighted in all of life! So, yes, I think He did giggle just before He was to show Himself to the Twelve, maybe with a little aside to the Holy Spirit: *“Watch this!”* I think there was a huge smirk on His face as He stepped in front of the women at the tomb. And I think when He left the Emmaus disciples Hew was laughing so hard that He sides hurt — and not from the mark of the

spear!

He is risen! This is not just Good News! This is riotous Good News! The is laugh out loud news! This is turn your tears into giggles news! This is “I can’t believe what I’m seeing” guffawing news! He is not here! He is risen!

Get it?

You thought that the tomb would be and remain a place of sadness and sorrow? Gotcha! Not here! You thought you were bringing spices for a burial? Ha! Take your stinky aloe and cloves and let’s “part-ay”! You sat in this room for three days convinced that everything was over, and that the next victims were going to be you? Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

Satan! Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho. Thought you’d won, didn’t you? Ha!

And you — whatever it was that you brought here that was weighing down on your heart and causing you to worry or be anxious ...

Was that person standing in the grocery store line behind me a “carrier”?

Can I really go another four to six weeks without a face-to-face appointment with my doctor?

Will this virus become an annual event, as some are predicting?

Is there someone right now lying in a hospital bed but I haven’t heard of their condition?

Will I ever get back to work?

Will the economy ever return to robust, or even normal?

I’ve got news for you — I have Good News for you: That stuff had all been buried with Jesus . . . it’s not here! Get it? Not here? Gone. Done. Wiped clean. Washed away.

So don’t stand around like the mannequins that you’ve seen in just about every piece of Christian artwork that has been commissioned by some

denominational publishing house ... wth frozen faces and folded hands, receiving the Good News, welcoming the Risen Lord as if He were a piece of hamburger left over from last week's barbeque.

Rejoice! Laugh! Celebrate!

This is not Maundy Thursday . . . or Good Friday . . . or Holy Saturday. This is not a wake . . . we're no longer keeping watch to determine whether or not the death was real. It was real . . . and it doesn't matter!

He is risen! Get it? He is risen!!! Hoo-hoo-hoo.

Amen.