

John 20:19-31

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The Last Laugh 3

April 23, 2017

A Sunday School teacher asked her class on the Sunday before Easter if they knew what happened on Easter and why it was so important.

One little girl spoke up saying: "Easter is when the whole family gets together, and you eat turkey and sing about the pilgrims and all that." "No, that's not it," said the teacher.

"I know what Easter is," a second student responded. "Easter is when you get a tree and decorate it and give gifts to everybody and sing lots of songs." "Nope, that's not it either," replied the teacher.

Finally, a third student spoke up, "Easter is when Jesus was killed, and put in a tomb and left for three days." "Ah, thank goodness somebody knows" the teacher thought to herself.

But then the student went on: "Then everybody gathers at the tomb and waits to see if Jesus comes out, and if he sees his shadow he has to go back inside and we have six more weeks of winter." (Let's hope not!)

A father put his three year old daughter to bed, told her a story and listened to her prayers, which she ended by saying, "God bless mommy, God bless daddy, God bless grandma, and good-bye grandpa."

The father said, "Why did you say good-bye grandpa?"

The little girl said, "I don't know daddy, it just seemed like the thing to do."

The next day grandpa died. Father thought it was a strange coincidence.

A few months later the father put the girl to bed and listened to her prayers, which went like this: "God bless mommy, God bless daddy and good-bye grandma."

Next day the grandmother died.

My gosh, thought the father, this kid is in contact with the other side.

Several weeks later when the girl was going to bed the dad heard her say,

“God bless mommy and good-bye daddy.”

He practically went into shock. Couldn't sleep all night and got up at the crack of dawn to go to his office. He was nervous as a cat all day, had lunch sent in and watched the clock. He figured if he could get by until midnight he would be OK. He felt safe in the office, so instead of going home at the end of the day he stayed there, drinking coffee, looking at his watch and jumping at every sound. Finally midnight arrived; he breathed a sigh of relief and went home.

When he got home his wife said, “I've never seen you work so late, what's the matter?”

He said, “I don't want to talk about it, I've just spent the worst day of my life.”

She said, “You think you had a bad day, you'll never believe what happened to me. This morning the mailman dropped dead on our porch.”

Or how about the man and a woman who had been friends for many years, who had died and gone to heaven. They told St. Peter that they wanted to be married.

“Take your time and think about it,” said St. Peter, “you have eternity, so take fifty years and see me then.”

Fifty years later, the couple returned and again told St. Peter they wanted to be married. “Well,” said St. Peter, “take another fifty years and really think about it....”

But the couple was insistent, “We know we want to be married now....”

St. Peter replied, “Well, take another fifty years, and if we don't have a preacher up here by then, I'll marry you myself.”

On this second Sunday in Easter, which is also known as Low Sunday, presumably because after Easter there is significantly lower attendance, and many schools are on spring break, we always have the text from John about Doubting Thomas. I suppose after the high of Easter Sunday there is a bit of a letdown when Monday rolls around and we go back to life as usual. Jesus has risen, the disciples have fled, the celebration is over, the Easter egg hunts are over, the chocolate bunnies have all been eaten, the family gatherings are over, and we may be feeling a bit low too. We turn on the news and things are just as troubling as they were before Easter. We may be feeling a bit like the disciples huddled behind closed doors having a few doubts of our own.

Fortunately, there is also a tradition among many churches and denominations that refer to this as Holy Humor Sunday or Hilarity Sunday. It is a custom dating all the way back to the Greek. It is a day when the church celebrates the great joke that God has played on sin and death by the resurrection of Jesus. The day is usually marked by jokes, humor, and great laughter. In the ancient Church, churchgoers and pastors played practical jokes on each other, drenched each other with water, wore wacky outfits, told jokes, sang, and danced. Maybe we can do the happy dance again?

G.K. Chesterton once wrote: *“Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly. Never forget that the devil fell by force of gravity. He who has the faith has the fun.”*

In our reading this morning from Ecclesiastes, we heard that there is time for all things in our lives and there is especially a time for laughter and maybe now is that time. Lord knows, if anyone needs a good laugh right now

it is the church. Rev. Chris Anderson of Heidelberg United Church of Christ in York, PA, on their Holy Humor Sunday told this story: “One day Groucho Marx was getting off an elevator and he happened to meet a clergyman. The clergyman came up to him, put out his hand and said, ‘I want to thank you for all the joy you’ve put into the world.’ Groucho shook hands and replied, ‘Thank you, Reverend. I want to thank you for all the joy you’ve taken out of it.’”

Anderson goes on to say, “This comment tells us a lot about how many people view clergy, Christianity, and God. Most people assume that clergy are to be stern, Christianity is to be humorless, and God is never to be found laughing. It would appear to these people that the Christmas angel announced to the shepherds: ‘Behold, I bring you bad news of great sorrow for all the people!’” Anderson noted that Jesus used humor as a healing tool “to unmask his listeners,” and that God indeed does laugh, especially at Easter time.”

And even this morning when he suddenly appears behind his friends, in a locked room, where they are so focused on their own fear, he must have surprised the heck out of them. I can imagine that there were a few screams and a few people jumping out of their skins, when Jesus said, “Peace be with you!” Someone must have shouted, “Holy cow! Don’t ever do that again!” I know I would have jumped a foot off the ground! And then there was Rejoicing! That’s what it says. “Rejoicing.” And if Jesus wasn’t smiling about it, I would be very surprised indeed! And maybe some of these will make you smile too.

Q: Did you hear about the Pentecostal preacher that married the Amish woman?

A: He drove her buggy.

Q. What do you get when you cross a Jehovah's Witness with an atheist?

A. Someone who knocks on doors for no apparent reason!

Q. What happens if you don't pay your exorcist?

A. You get repossessed!

Q. How do you make holy water?

A. You boil the "hell" out of it!

Q. What kind of man was Boaz before he married?

A. Ruthless.

Q. What do they call pastors in Germany?

A. German Shepherds.

Q. What excuse did Adam give to his children as to why he no longer lived in Eden?

A. “Your mother ate us out of house and home!”

A young lady came home from a date rather sad. She told her mother, "Anthony proposed to me an hour ago." "Then why are you so sad?" her mother asked.

"Because he also told me he is an atheist. Mom, he doesn't even believe there's a Hell."

Her mother replied, "Marry him anyway. Between the two of us, we'll show him how wrong he is."

Today the disciples are facing their worst fears. Jesus is missing and they are not sure what to do next. Suddenly he is there and fear is turned into laughter and rejoicing. And laughter has a way of diminishing our fear and worry, doesn't it? And I like to think Jesus laughs right along with us. And even though the world around us seems tragic and without a reason to smile, let me suggest that there is more good happening in the

world each and every day than you can imagine. It doesn't make the evening news but it is there all around you if you keep your eyes open. And I like to think that Jesus is right in the midst of all that goodness, encouraging us, loving us, and laughing at evil's feeble attempts to frighten us. I guess it depends on how you see the world. Laughter may even bring us some peace, a peace that I think God wants us to have. Peace for our past, peace for our present, and peace for our future. Peace that Jesus pours out on us all.

"He who laughs last, laughs best." I don't know where that comes from. I think it is an Old Italian proverb, but it seems to fit Jesus just right. He comes into our lives in the darkest moments and brings peace and light. He surprises us like no other. He lets us touch him and face our fears and doubts and then he breathes on us the breath of life and Spirit that we may live, and live fully and abundantly. The work is finished in Him. But like the disciples, we never know when he might appear. More often than not, it is when we least expect it, and maybe even when we have the doors of our hearts locked and bolted; the widows covered with plastic and duct tape. When laughter and joy have left the building, suddenly he is present. Which reminds me of another of my favorite stories...**The Baptism**

A drunk stumbles upon a baptismal service on a Sunday afternoon down by the river.

He proceeds to walk down into the water and stand next to the Preacher.

The minister turns and notices the old drunk and says, "Mister, are you ready to find Jesus?"

The drunk looks back and says, "Yes, Preacher, I sure am."

The minister then dunks the fellow under the water and pulls him right back up.

"Have you found Jesus?" the preacher asked.

"No, I didn't!" said the drunk.

The preacher then dunks him under for quite a bit longer, brings him up and says, "Now, brother, have you found Jesus?"

"No, I did not Reverend."

The preacher in disgust holds the man under for at least 30 seconds this time and when he brings him out of the water he says in a harsh tone, "My God, have you found Jesus yet?"

The old drunk wipes his eyes and says to the preacher...

"Are you sure this is where he fell in?"

Sometimes we are just looking for Jesus in the wrong places I guess. But in this locked room, the Jesus who laughs, appears, and when he does doubts fade away. Rejoicing takes place and the word begins to get out. Even Thomas, a week later, enjoys the same experience that the other disciples did and he only needs a moment to declare, "My Lord and My God!" Perhaps you too have been hidden away in the locked room of your hearts, and have your own doubts and fears today. To you, Jesus will come and say, "Peace be with you." Look and see, touch and be satisfied. You may still have your doubts and that's ok. He will keep coming to you. You may not be sure today, but he will give you every opportunity to change your mind. To be satisfied that he is for real.

But what you can be sure of is this. He came to be one with us. To walk with us and live among us. He wept with us and hungered with us. He wandered the wilderness not only of his life but ours as well. He ate and drank with us. Danced and rejoiced with us. Laughed with us and comforted us. He loved us so much that he walked toward death and overcame it and was risen again that we too, might be risen and saved and forgiven. He goes ahead to prepare a place for us and while that may sound funny as all get out to anyone who hears it. It is, I kid you not, no Joke. Amen.