

AND JESUS LAUGHED

A Sermon for Easter Day 2018

St. Paul's Cathedral Kamloops BC

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With notes from Miles Townes, The Christian Century

Today, two very different dates and events collide. As the Church celebrates the festival of Christ's resurrection from the dead, a secular world celebrates April Fools Day. Both have been around a long time. April Fools Day (our daughter's birthday by the way) may have first appeared in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Through literature and public discourse pranks continue even today, my favourite jester being WestJet Airlines, especially when they decided to fill the cabin with helium to make the load lighter. For a brief moment, I believed them.

It is neither stretch nor slight to say that the resurrection itself was a joke—and a good one. **What more could Jesus have done to mock the world that killed him than rise from the dead?** Many however, did not find the resurrection funny!

One lady in a previous parish, a woman with a fine sense of humour I note, was not impressed with my Easter roadside sign: "Caution, Jesus is on the loose." I must say it was not my own creation, but recommended by a colleague who likely heard it from John Masefield who wrote "Jesus ... is alive and at large in the world."

Today Jesus shouts, with a smile, I am resurrection and I am life – no kidding. And the joke is on us all . . .

A good joke in the moral sense, then, depends on our ability to see the difference between *what is* and *what should be*. The humour comes in the tension between the two. A good joke can light up the dark between

the two, can help us see one from the other. Not everything that is funny is a joke, and not every funny joke is a good or appropriate joke, but a good joke helps us see the distance between *who we are* and *who we should be*. Again, the humour, and the life-challenge comes between the two. Who but Jesus ever saw so clearly the distance between *is* and *should*? Who else had the imagination to grasp fully the gulf between heaven and earth? Who else could grasp the transformed potential of humanity alongside the traditions and practice of human beings? Who could endure the tension, the disappointment, while hanging on to the possibility of a transformed world. We see this clearly in Gethsemane:

(If it is possible, take this cup of suffering away from me. But let what you want be done, not what I want" (Gospel according to Matthew)

For some, humour and Christ are difficult companions. Some of us have spiritualized Jesus out of the realm of humanity. The idea that the Christ who bridged this divide might lack a sense of humor seems a stony-faced denial of Jesus' humanity. Laughter is both human and humane, an essential tool to help us cross the distance to God.

The Easter joke is not only on us; today the joke's on Mary

She turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbani!"

Jesus finds Mary Magdalene weeping over the tomb. Mary, "supposing him to be a gardener," does not recognize him. That seems like

exceptional insight into Mary's interior life, but it is also a joke, about Mary's failure to recognize Jesus, and also a joke about our difficulty in seeing Jesus. And John the Gospeller is ultimately concerned that we seen Jesus properly and clearly.

"Jokes can be noble," says Kurt Vonnegut. "Laughs are exactly as honorable as tears." We have no problem with the Jesus who wept. This Easter, let's grapple with the Jesus who laughed.

Because he did, and does . . .

Happy Easter