

Holy Humor
Psalm 100, 1 Peter 1:3-9
4/3/2016

A dose of humor

A little boy opened the big family bible. He was fascinated as he fingered through the old pages. Suddenly, something fell out of the Bible. He picked up the object and looked at it. What he saw was an old leaf that had been pressed in between the pages. "Mama, look what I found", the boy called out. "What have you got there, dear?" With astonishment in the young boy's voice, he answered, "I think it's Adam's underwear!"

Holy Humor Sunday is not a recent invention. The origins of this celebration go back hundreds of years as a way of celebrating God's resurrection victory over Satan. The idea was to laugh at Satan who had been outwitted by God.

The medieval church believed that Satan could absolutely not stand laughter. At least not genuine laughter. If you laugh at the evil one he has no power over you.

Let's face it, we live in a world that is joy impaired. We are surrounded by chronic seriousness and bad news. Unfortunately the world likes to focus on the negative.

The Christian perspective, on the other hand, is positively joyful. Christians are Easter People. Because of Easter, we have the knowledge, the faith, the hope and the relationship with Jesus Christ that can turn sadness into gladness.

It's kind of like the minister who was preoccupied with thoughts of how he was going to ask the congregation to come up with more money than they were expecting for repairs to the church building. Therefore, he talked with the organist to see what kind of inspirational music she could play after the announcement about the finances to get the congregation in a giving

mood. "Don't worry," she said. "I'll think of something." During the service, the minister paused and said, "Brothers and Sisters, we are in great difficulty; the roof repairs cost twice as much as we expected, and we need \$4,000 more. Any of you who can pledge \$100 or more, please stand up." Just at that moment, the organist started playing, "The Star Spangled Banner."

We can face the world and the circumstances of life with eternal optimism because we see the good that is coming. We will all be reunited in Christ. Nothing, not even death can separate us from the love of God!

Rev. Peter Marshall said, "Let's not live another day as if Christ were dead." Today we are celebrating Holy Humor Sunday. Laughter is a sign that we are filled with God's blessings.

Many American churches are resurrecting this old Easter custom begun by the Greeks in the centuries of early Christianity which basically continues the Easter celebration to the Sunday following it. We don't celebrate Jesus rising from the dead on just one Sunday, but always.

For centuries in Eastern Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches, the week following Easter was observed by the faithful as "days of joy and laughter" with parties and picnics to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. Churchgoers and Pastors played practical jokes on each other, boys drenched the girls with water and the girls drenched the boys right back. People told jokes, sang joyful songs, and danced.

The custom was rooted in the musings of the early church theologians about God's actions at Easter which they called, "Risus paschalis – the Easter laugh."

So if you'd like to share the joke that was in your egg or another church appropriate joke that you know please stand and we'll get a microphone to you.

God delights in our laughter and receives it as an act of worship. Our service today continues the Easter story. We're celebrating the greatest practical joke of all time: God overturned death. God had the last laugh over death.

Episcopal Bishop William Frey wrote: "What, after all, is a joke? Isn't it something that hinges on the unpredictable or unreasonable? There is nothing more unreasonable than the resurrection of Jesus. Easter is the morning when the Lord laughs out loud, laughs at all the things that snuff out joy, all the things that pretend to be all-powerful, like cruelty and anger and despair and evil, and most especially, that great pretender, death. Jesus sweeps them away with his wonderful resurrection laughter."

A pastor was speaking to a group of children about the resurrection of Jesus when one of the children asked, "what did Jesus say when he came out of the grave?" The pastor started to answer when one of the other children became very excited and said, "I know, I know what he said: He said, 'Tah-dah!'"

God played a practical joke on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead. Three days Jesus lay in a tomb. Three days the devil celebrated. But on the morning of the third day, God had the last laugh! Jesus conquered death. Jesus conquered sin. Jesus was alive again, bringing new life and laughter to all. Let us give thanks for the great joy we have in Christ who gives us love, laughter and the promise of life everlasting!

Shout triumphantly to the Lord, all the earth!
Serve the Lord with celebration and laughter!
Come before him with shouts of joy!
Know that the Lord is God—
he made us; we belong to him.
We are his people,
the sheep of his own pasture.
Enter his gates with thanks;
enter his courtyards with praise!
Thank him! Bless his name!
Because the Lord is good,
his loyal love lasts forever;
his faithfulness lasts generation after generation.

1 Peter 1:3-9

Common English Bible

May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be blessed! On account of his vast mercy, he has given us new birth. You have been born anew into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. You have a pure and enduring inheritance that cannot perish—an inheritance that is presently kept safe in heaven for you. Through his faithfulness, you are guarded by God's power so that you can receive the salvation he is ready to reveal in the last time.

You now rejoice in this hope, even if it's necessary for you to be distressed for a short time by various trials. This is necessary so that your faith may be found genuine. (Your faith is more valuable than gold, which will be destroyed even though it is itself tested by fire.) Your genuine faith will result in praise, glory, and honor for you when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you've never seen him, you love him. Even though you don't see him now, you trust him and so rejoice with a glorious joy that is too much for words. You are receiving the goal of your faith: your salvation.