

## God's Foolishness: John 20:1-18

Norwalk Christian Church, April 1, 2018, Easter Sunday, Year B

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It hasn't happened since 1956, and, in fact, it only happened four times last century. It won't happen again until 2029, and then not until 2040.

Suffice it to say, it's rare, having Easter spring up on April 1st, April Fool's Day. We thought about incorporating some April Fool's jokes into the service today. Someone wanted to surprise Pastor Marti by dumping ice into the baptistry.

Someone else wanted to fill some of our communion cups, today, with grape jello instead of grape juice...<cough cough> Andy Pratt...I don't think that one happened...but I guess we will find out.

But after intense debate and much deliberation, we've decided today to go prank-free. Nothing but well-known Easter hymns, a warm baptistry, and the familiar Gospel story.

Because, although April Fools Day has a long history, Easter happened first.

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We already read the story again. Though the exact year is not known, we know around 2,000 years ago Easter happened.

But when April Fool's Day began is another story. It was in the 1700s in England, when April 1st became an annual day of jokes and pranks, but the celebration of a late March, early April day of pranks is older than that.

There may even be roots all the way back to the ancient Greco-Roman festival of *Hilaria* which included jokes and masquerades. But no one really knows, for sure, when this April 1st tradition started. And we don't know why. But for a very long time, we humans have thought it a good idea to devote a day to fooling one another.

Maybe it's because of this season. There's something about Spring that brings out our facetiousness. Early spring, really, is one big joke. I mean, cloudy with highs in the 30s on Easter Morning? You've got to be joking.

But once Spring sets in, eventually, you can't help but smile. After the cold of winter, it feels good to be in the sun. It's almost comical, how a bulb, frozen in the dirt since November, will pop up out of the ground on cue, with no help from us.

All around us, creation is waking up. We should be smiling. We should be laughing. And maybe, in the spirit of the season, it's okay to even play a prank on a friend, not to mock them, but as if to say, Wake up! Pay attention. It's Spring! It's April Fool's Day! And you never know what might happen today.

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We don't know the actual date of the first Easter, but it very well could've been April 1st. Perhaps that's why the Easter story plays out in classic practical joke fashion. You almost expect the angel to say, "Smile, you're on Candid Camera." There are hidden identities, unexpected twists, and maybe even a little, light-hearted cruelty.

It's early that morning, before dawn--still dark--but there is no laughing, only crying, as Mary checks on Jesus' tomb. She has to see it for herself. See where her Lord's remains would remain. But seeing that the stone had been rolled away, she runs away, gets the other disciples, and tells them, "They have taken the Lord, and we do not know where they have laid him." No one is laughing.

Together, they run back to Jesus' tomb. Peter sticks his head in, and "he saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself." Such fine detail. The perfect set up.

But here's what's really funny to me. When the men see all this, they just go home. They don't wait for this to play out. But Mary...Mary stays, and she's weeping outside of the tomb. When she finally gets up the nerve to look inside, it's not empty after all. There are two angels in there. "Why are you weeping?" If they're trying to be funny, it comes off as cruel. Isn't it obvious why she is weeping?

"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

That's when Mary hears something behind her. It's a man.

"Why are you weeping?" the man says to Mary. "Whom are you looking for?" The same, cruel joke, but only more so. Mary thinks he's the gardener, and begins to yell: "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

It all seems pretty foolish, when you think about it. But what other explanation is there?

Of course, we are in on the joke. Even though she is weeping, it's hard to stay in character, to not crack a smile. This man...he is no gardener. This is Jesus. Jesus, who just a few days ago, told his disciples, "I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and I call them by name, and they know my voice." And Jesus calls her name, "Mary!", she knows. She gets it! "My Rabbi!" she says, and she grabs a hold of her...and we are off camera, just grinning from ear to ear, laughing and crying and laughing.

After Jesus leaves, Mary returns to the other disciples, who went home and missed it all. And she shouts out the Good News, testifying: "I have seen the Lord"!

I have seen the Lord. That's the declaration of Easter. That's what Easter People say. In Greek, the language this was all first written in, it's a verb tense called "Perfect". Perfect

tense has no real equivalent in English Grammar. It's used to show an action in the past that continues to happen, that continues to impact the present.

In other words, seeing the Lord changes everything for Mary. The consequences of seeing the Lord happened, but are still playing out, now, and into the future.

See, that's what happens when when see the Lord. It changes everything. The Easter story happened a long, long time ago, yet still it happens, even today, we feel it's reverberations.

That day in the Garden, while the world was still dark, God began something new--a resurrection revolution. As Jesus climbed out of that tomb, he made a mockery of the fear and hate that crucified him, triumphing over the powers that desire to steal, kill, and destroy.

Mary was the first witness, the first to join in God's revolution. And everytime we join in her declaration, everytime we say, "I have seen the Lord," everytime we encounter new life and see hope rise, we join in the revolution.

For we are not people without hope. Church, we are Easter people. We are agents of new life. And we cannot stand here, on Easter morning, without going out there and declare with Mary, "I have seen the Lord!"

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Perhaps the most foolish part of it all is that God's revolution hinges on witnesses. Resurrection must be announced. Had Mary not shared the news, would we know?

Yet, here we are, still singing, "Christ the Lord is Risen...not then, but Today!" It's a strange thing to proclaim. But in here, it doesn't seem so foolish. In here, we sing-a-long. In here, we believe.

But what if we were to sing it out there, in the midst of a world obsessed with violence, and oppression, a world content to cheat, lie, fool, prank, steal, kill, and destroy--all for the sake of amassing wealth and power. What if we were to stand, right in the midst of a dying world, while it is still dark, and have the audacity to proclaim, when all evidence seems to suggest otherwise, "I have seen the Lord!"

To say, Resurrection is happening. Death is not the end. Injustice will be defeated. And goodness and peace and love are winning. This may the grandest foolishness of all.

I heard a DJ on the radio while driving yesterday, who refer to today as Easter Fools Day. It was annoying at first. I also wrecked the van, I rolled my eyes so hard. But when I stopped complaining, I began to like it. Easter Fools—that's what we are. That's Church!

And Church, here's your April Fool's Joke. Though you may not see it, and it is not fully realized, the resurrection revolution *is* happening. It's beginning to bloom all around us!

And the joke is on death. The joke is on the grave. The joke is on anyone who tries to steal away life. The joke is us, when we believe that there is no hope, that we cannot be born again, and again, and again. And again.

Maybe we should be laughing this morning so hard we cry, because this is *such* good news. That death has no victory. The powers of injustice and oppression will not win. And you and I--and all creation--are becoming new.

Hope! Believe! Live! Join the revolution! Be born a new!

In a moment, instead of the hymn listed in the bulletin, Tim Diebel is going to sing for us a brand new song, written by a Disciples musician, called *Hope Will Rise, Again*.

The refrain goes like this: Church, we are Easter people! Turning power upside down! In the valley of the shadow, we're the candle in the window, saying hope will rise again.

Everybody, hear the story. Grace is given free! All together, true forever! There's no where Love can't reach! We are Easter People, Now!

So let the walls be broken down! Revolution all around! We are Easter People, Now!

We are Easter fools!

And Hope will rise again!

Hope is rising again! Don't you see it? Can you believe it!?

This is not a joke.

No fooling!

Amen? **Amen!**