

SERMON

A man built a new house. He was very excited about the new house and how he was going to be able to entertain family and friends. And when the house was finally done, he was so excited to share his new address with all his family and friends.

Shortly after he moved in, there was a knock on the door and he answered it. It was a flower delivery. A lovely bouquet and he wondered who would have sent him flowers? Who would do such a thing? So he pulled out the card and **ready it: "With sympathy."**

Across town was the funeral for a man who had recently died. There was also a flower delivery at the funeral. A beautiful bouquet and the card read: **"Congratulations on your new home."** That joke was told to me specifically to share on this Sunday.

Holy Humor Sunday—a lighthearted Sunday—sometimes called Bright Sunday. When we celebrate the joy that God gives, the joke that was played on the Devil and our own invitation to new life—to that new home. Let us pray:

Three-year old Nicole was as anxious for Easter to come as she had been for Christmas to come. As her mother was expecting their third child in just a few weeks, many persons were giving the family baby gifts. Nicole had picked out a new dress and her mother had given her a new white bonnet. As they stopped at a store to buy her a new pair of shoes to go with her outfit, she once again said, "I can't wait for Easter, Daddy!" Her father asked her, "Do you know what Easter means, honey?" She replied, "Yes." "Well, what does Easter mean?" In her own sweet three-year-old way, with arms raised, a smile on her face, and at the top of her voice she said, "Surprise!"

Humor. Why is this called Holy Humor Sunday? A long time ago, in the Middle Ages in fact, there was a tradition of celebrating with joy and humor the week after Easter. It is said to have started with a monk who broke out in laughter—violating the rules on silence—because he **realized the Jesus' resurrection was** like a great joke on the devil. The devil thought he won, the devil thought he

beat God, when what really happened was that Jesus defeated death, once and for all.

Holy Humor, indeed. Humor is truly a gift from God. In Proverbs 17, it is written:

"A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones."

Well, we don't want to be dry and brittle bones, do we? We are a resurrection people—and this is a time of celebration.

Humor is a tricky thing. I am a Star Trek fan, I liked the original, which I watched in reruns as a child, but also liked Star Trek the next Generation. Data was one of my favorite characters—he tried to make a study of humor and what was funny—he wasn't very successful. Humor is hard to define and hard to translate. For example, what is funny about saying to someone, "don't you dare laugh!" And yet it was the fastest way to get me to laugh, especially as a child. There was a video Tim showed me, the NFL Bad Joke Telling Contest: (excerpts)

First of all, some of these jokes are pretty good. But the funniest part is these guys trying NOT to laugh. It makes the jokes so much funnier.

Humor, truly a gift from God. So here's a few jokes I found:

- If the teacher taught, Why didn't the preacher praught?
- If a vegetarian eats vegetables, what the heck does a humanitarian eat!?

Why do people recite at a play, yet play at a recital?

Park on driveways and drive on parkways

Or When a house burns up we say it burned down

Or when you fill in a form we say you filled it out.

When the stars are out they are visible, but when the lights are out they are invisible

When I wind up my watch, it starts, but when I wind up my sermon, it ends.

Or these, with a nod to Jeff Foxworthy: You might be in a redneck church if...

- The Call to Worship is , "Y'all come on in!"
- People grumble about how Noah let coyotes on the Ark.
- The Preacher says, "I'd like to ask Bubba to help take up the offering" and five guys stand up.
- Opening day of deer hunting season is recognized as an official church holiday. (hmmm, it's a state holiday where I'm from)
- A member requests to be buried in his four-wheel drive truck because, "I ain't never been in a hole it couldn't get me out of".
- The only time people lock their cars in the parking lot is during the summer and then only so their neighbors can't leave them a bag of squash.
- Finding and returning lost sheep is not just a parable, but an actual reason someone will miss church.
- High notes on the organ set dogs in the parking lot to howling.
- People wonder when Jesus fed the 5,000 whether the two fish were bass or catfish.
- It's OK to insult someone as long as the first words you say are, "Now bless her heart, but. . ."
- The final words, of the benediction are, "Y'all come on back now, ya hear!"

Of course, the disciples were not exactly celebrating. They didn't think there was anything to laugh at. They thought they had known what the future would be. They thought they knew what Jesus was doing—but it was all turned around. Jesus was crucified and they were huddled in a room, filled with fear—according to the gospel of John.

They are scared. They are scared of the powers, the same powers that put Jesus to death, powers that were threatened by Jesus and would be even more threatened by news of the resurrection. So hearing of the missing body would not put them at ease, rather it would make them even more nervous.

And Jesus, who was so changed that Mary Magdalene didn't recognize him, entered that locked room—suddenly standing before the disciples—well most of **them anyway. I'm not sure having someone—even your Rabbi, suddenly appear through solid walls would bring you comfort.**

Jesus offers them peace in the midst of their fears, and maybe that peace gives them enough courage to overcome their fears. **"Peace be with you."** **And then Jesus breathes on them, saying "welcome the holy spirit."** Much like God breathing life into creation, this is the new creation. Indeed, ancient Christian churches and baptismal fonts have 8 sides because Jesus return was the new creation—the eighth day. It's why as Christians we worship on Sunday—the eighth day, rather than the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday.

And then, in yet another surprise twist, Jesus does not empower them for revenge or ask them to take up arms and avenge him. Instead, he gives them the power to forgive, the power to bring joy and peace. It was a message for them all—well all except Thomas. Thomas was missing. We don't know why—maybe so this story could be here. And when the disciples tell Thomas about Jesus, he says, "I'll believe it when I see it."

A week later, they are in the house together again. John tells us that the doors **were again shut. He doesn't use the word "locked" this time, but one has to wonder if their fear was gone.** And this time, Thomas is with them.

Thomas, forever known as Doubting Thomas.

Poor Thomas, he had a bit of doubt and forever to be known for it.

Thomas who heard of Jesus' miraculous appearance, but did not see it, said he wouldn't believe it unless Jesus himself walked in and Thomas could put his hands in the wounds.

Rev. Jeffrey Spencer reminds us, that Thomas needed to see the wounds because the wounds reveal Jesus. It's been said, "You can't see the Risen One unless you can **see the Crucified.**" That says something about being the body of Christ today. If we don't include the wounded, the scarred, how can we include the Risen One?

Three of the four times Thomas is mentioned in John's gospel (he's only mentioned in lists of disciples in the other gospels), he is referred to as "the twin." The twin of whom, Rev. Spencer wonders, "Perhaps he is the twin of you and me." Perhaps we are more like Thomas and his doubts than we like to think.

When Jesus appears to the disciples, including Thomas, he doesn't chastise Thomas as we might expect. Instead he provides Thomas what he needs. And then in words that seem meant more for us than anyone in that room, Jesus says, "**blessed are those who have not seen me, and yet come to believe.**"

What Thomas needed was to see the scarred man, and in that scarring, the divine was revealed to him.

There are scriptures I take comfort from. The story of doubting Thomas is one of them. Because if he can have doubts, given all he knew and all he saw, then it is OK for me to have doubts. It's OK for you to have doubts and to be troubled.

And when the disciples gathered, they included people with an imperfect faith—those with fear, and those with doubts. And they built a fellowship—indeed an uprising of fellowship. McLaren says:

We have a term for what the disciples began to experience that night: **fellowship.** "Fellowship is a kind of belong that isn't based on status, achievement, or gender, [or orientation, or race, or ethnicity, any of the other ways people divide themselves,] but instead is based on a deeper belief that everyone matters, everyone is welcome, and everyone is loved, no conditions, **no exceptions.** It's not the kind of belonging you find at the top of the ladder among those who think they are the best, but at the bottom among all the rest, with all the other failures and losers who have either climbed the ladder and fallen, or [who] never [got] up enough gumption [or never had the resources] to climb in the first place."

Fellowship is for scarred people and scared people and people with doubts and imperfect people. Doubt is not the worst thing that can happen to us. Fear is not the worst things that can happen to us. Letting it stop us is. I have a video for you:

[video of Will Smith on fear] <https://www.goalcast.com/2017/04/15/will-smith-bliss-other-side-fear/>

We cannot let fear or doubt stop us from being part of the fellowship Christ calls us to. We are to be a fellowship that invites all into God's great love. Amen.