

Bright Sunday: A Time to Laugh & Rejoice Reading: John 20:19-31 Easter 2/A
By the Rev. Karen Faye Siegfried; Trinity Episcopal Church, Sutter Creek, CA 4/23/17

There is an old saying: "If something sounds too good to be true, then it probably isn't true." Today we read the gospel story about Thomas, a faithful disciple of Jesus who hears something that seems too good to be true: That the risen Christ appeared to the other disciples when he was absent. Thomas is having a hard time believing their story. No wonder he has his doubts. Why wouldn't he? The concept of resurrection is so foreign and so unique that it is difficult to wrap the human mind around this good news. Even Mary Magdalene had her doubts when she arrived at the tomb on Easter morning and saw it empty. When the risen Christ appeared to her in person, she thought he was the gardener. It was only when he called her by name that she recognized him as the teacher. So it seems reasonable that Thomas would want concrete evidence to accept that Jesus had indeed been raised.

Faith is a radical trust in life and by implication, trust in the Source of life. Doubt is not the opposite of faith. Apathy is! Doubt is the desire to understand what appears mysterious or is beyond current comprehension. Doubt keeps us questioning and can become a motivation to fully explore the mysteries of the faith. Apathy on the other hand is not caring about the subject at all and therefore simply dismissing it. When you really think about it, the only concrete evidence that we have of the resurrection is the witness of Jesus' disciples written down in Scripture some 2000 years ago. None of us here actually saw the empty tomb. Jesus did not appear to us in the upper room. We did not have the privilege of seeing the wounds of his hands and side like Thomas did. No wonder we too have our doubts.

However, what many of us do have is the personal experience of the risen Christ; that sustaining presence of God that warms our hearts and strengthens our trust in God's benevolence. In fact, this Presence is so alive in the world today that almost 200 million Christians in the United States attended Easter services this year. And while many of them still have their doubts, nevertheless, there was something compelling about the Spirit of the Risen Christ that motivated them to worship on that day. I think it would do the church well to spend more time on creating an environment where the risen Christ can be more fully experienced and to help people notice this Divine Presence in their own lives.

The good news is that neither the locked doors behind which the disciples were hiding nor the fear and disbelief that they were experiencing on that first Easter could keep the risen Christ out. While fear and disbelief might hinder us from fully embracing the risen Christ, fear and disbelief cannot prevent this living Presence of God from blessing our lives or offering us peace. This is good news, amazing news, news that should make our hearts glad. So let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Today is the second Sunday of Easter, a joyous continuation of the good news in Christ. One of the ways we rejoice is by celebrating Bright Sunday, (A.K.A. Holy Humor Sunday). Many American churches are resurrecting an old Easter custom begun by the early Greek Christians who celebrated the week after Easter as "days of joy and laughter" with parties and picnics to celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

Laughter is strong medicine for the mind and body. When laughter is shared, it binds people together and increases happiness and intimacy. Laughter can strengthen our immune system, boost our energy, diminish pain, and protect us from the damaging effects of stress. Best of all, laughter is fun, free, and easy to use. "Humor is the prelude to faith and laughter is the beginning of prayer." [Reinhold Niebuhr] So here goes some holy humor to lighten our hearts during this season of new life and joy.

-About 10:00am one cold February morning, a man was sound asleep in bed. His mother came into his room and said: Son, it's time to get up. You gotta get ready for church." "Leave me alone, he said. I am just too tired." "Son, you gotta get up and get ready for church, she repeated." "I am not going to church. Give me one good reason why I have to go to church, he protested." "I will give you two good reasons: 1. It is Sunday. 2. You are the pastor."

-After the Sunday service, a little boy told the pastor: "When I grow up, I am going to give you some money." "Well thank you," the pastor replied, "but why?" Because my daddy says you are one of the poorest preachers we've ever had."

-A ten-year old, under the tutelage of her grandmother, was becoming quite knowledgeable about the Bible. Then one day, she floored her grandmother by asking, "Which Virgin was the mother of Jesus? The Virgin Mary or the King James Virgin?"

-Gary was having a yard sale. A minister bought a lawn mower but returned it a few days later, complaining that it wouldn't run. "It'll run," said Gary. "But you have to curse at it to get it started." The minister was shocked. "I haven't uttered a curse in 30 years." "Well, just keep pulling on the starter rope—the words will come back to you."

-Don't let your worries get the best of you. Remember, Moses started out as a basket case.

-Moses led his people through the desert for 40 years. It seems, even in Biblical times, men avoided asking for directions.

-On their way home from attending an Ash Wednesday service, little Johnny asked his mother: "Isn't it true Mommy, that we are made of dust like the minister said?" "Yes darling," his mother answered. "And is it true that we go back to dust again when we die?" "Yes dear." "Well, Mommy, when I said my prayers last night and looked under the bed, I saw someone who is either coming or going."

-A mother was giving instructions to her three children as she sent them into Sunday school and asked them: "And, why is it necessary to be quiet in church?" Her son quickly responded, "Because people are sleeping?"

-The preacher's 5 year-old daughter noticed that her preacher father always paused and bowed his head for a moment before starting his sermon. One day she asked him why. "Well, Honey," he began, proud that his daughter was so observant of his messages, "I'm asking the Lord to help me to preach a good sermon." "Well then, how come He doesn't do it?" she asked.

-A Sunday school teacher challenged her children to take some time on Sunday afternoon to write a letter to God. They were to bring their letter back the following Sunday. One little boy wrote: "Dear God, We had a good time at church today. Wish you could have been there."

-A little girl was talking to her teacher about whales. The teacher said it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human because even though they were very large mammals their throats were very small. The little girl stated that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. The teacher reiterated that a whale could not swallow a human; it was impossible. The little girl said, "When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah." The teacher asked, "What if Jonah went to hell?" The little girl replied, "Then you can ask him."

-Everything I need to know, I learned from Noah's Ark: 1. Don't miss the boat. 2. Remember that we are all in the same boat. 3. Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark. 4. Stay fit. When you're 600 years old, someone may ask you to do something really big. 5. Don't listen to critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done. 6. Build your future on high ground. 7. For safety's sake, travel in pairs. 8. Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs. 9. When you're stressed, float a while. 10. Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals. 11. No matter the storm, when you are with God, there's always a rainbow waiting.

Several Good Reasons to Laugh

- Frowning is hard work; it takes 43 muscles to frown but only 17 muscles to smile.
- "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones." [Proverbs 17:22]
- Red Skelton once said: "I live by this credo: Have a little laugh at life and look around you for happiness instead of sadness. Laughter has always brought me out of unhappy situation. Even in your darkest moment, you usually can find something to laugh about if you try hard enough. If I can make people laugh, then I have served my purpose for God."
- Jesus said: "These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete." [Jn. 15:11]
- St. Paul encouraged the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." [Phil. 4:4]
- So rejoice and be glad, for yours is the kingdom of God. Alleluia, Christ is risen!