

God's Divine Joke!
Easter 2018
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I can't resist: Happy April Fool's Day! The last time Easter fell on April Fools' Day was in 1956. Due to the quirks involved in dating Easter against the Gregorian calendar, the two rarely coincide. After 2018, the next one is 2029, and then again in 2040—but after that, not again in this century.

So how does April Fool's Day relate to Easter Sunday? The Resurrection is quite possibly God's greatest joke of all time! What more could Jesus have done to mock the world that killed him than to be missing from his grave due to having risen from the dead? Jesus was always turning things upside down—to make sense in the Kingdom of God. You know the first shall be last, the greatest among you will be your servant

Jesus actually had quite a sense of humor on earth. But, our Puritan tradition of disdain for levity, keeps us from viewing many of Jesus' responses in that way. There is a logic to this, according to Miles Townes, who says, we have no problem being fully human but struggle to be godly, so we focus on what is godly about Jesus, instead of his playfulness. (For more see: *When Easter Sunday falls on April Fools' Day*: by Miles Townes Feb 21, 2018) Paul writes in his letter to the church in Corinth that we are to be fools for Christ...to be deemed as jokers for the sake of the Gospel, and that we would probably look silly in the eyes of the world.

But let's go back to that early Easter morning. It might have been pretty funny to see how those who were entrusted to guard Jesus' tomb would have explained the empty tomb with the huge boulder blocking it having been rolled to the side. And then women, the two Mary's, and their encounter with the man sitting there-- Perhaps his comments were made with a chuckle...knowing the wonder of his message. In some of the other Gospels. The Risen Christ disguises himself as a gardener and is the person waiting for the women to come with the spices. That's pretty funny too! In Marks' account, Mary and Mary ran out in awe and fear. They ran wondering where Jesus went!

But I wonder if you and I would respond differently? We still wonder about that too, don't we? Where DID Jesus go? What is the Risen Christ up to, and what difference, if any, does his life and Resurrection mean to us all these years later?

My daughter, Peyton, has been home from college this week for Spring Break. (I preface this by saying she had given me permission to use this story!) I was really surprised to see her wearing a silver cross around her neck when she came home. I don't usually wear religious jewelry, and she certainly doesn't. In fact, she told me when she left for school in the Fall not to expect her to attend church at all while she is away. After all as a Pastor's kid, I would take a guess she's attended more services in her life than many of you sitting here this morning.

I looked at her, and asked her about it. What' up with the cross? She said matter-of-factly, "I'm going to wear it until I find Jesus." I tried not to be shocked or to chuckle. I've never heard such words from her. OK...I said, "Let's find Jesus."

We had to do a couple of errands that afternoon. One thing was to go to the grocery store and stock up on foods she eats which I don't usually keep on hand. At the Stop and Shop checkout, a lovely woman was helping us bag our items. She immediately began a conversation with Peyton. "Are you in college? Oh you must be home for Spring Break? Where do you go? Do you like it? It must be beautiful there." Peyton told her she had gone to Wilton High School. The woman, who has special needs, also commented on her beautiful cross. Peyton thanked her and with a huge smile, the woman wished us a happy Easter, and we were on our way.

As we walked out, I turned to Peyton, and I said, "I think you may have just met Jesus!" (Really what I should have said is the Risen Christ. Jesus was a physical man who lived here on earth...that's been scientifically proven) She looked at me a bit surprised, but she remained quiet.

But here's the thing...we don't need to go looking for the Risen Christ. Rev. Nadia Boltz-Weber says, "The movement in our relationship to God is always from God to us. Always. We can't, through our piety or goodness, move closer to God. God is always coming near to us. Most especially in the Eucharist and in the stranger."

(Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint*)

If we can embrace that idea, that God often meets us in the stranger and right here in the breaking of the bread with each other, it allows us to live our lives joyfully and to not take life so seriously...because we may be encountering the Holy at any turn! Think how you react when you see a great friend whom you know loves you...what a joy is that? That's the way we can greet one another, because the Risen Christ communicates to us in these types of interactions!

Introduction of Maggie Rowe (WPC high school student)

Good Morning. I am Maggie Rowe and I wanted to share a story with you this morning about my experience with Midnight Run a week ago. For those of you who are visiting this morning WPC travels into NYC throughout the year to bring food and clothing to homeless people. We caravan by cars or vans and spend some time interacting and hearing the stories that the homeless people care to share with us. During my experience on Midnight Run, I met a man named Carlos. Before moving to the City and living on the streets of NY, Carlos lived in Chicago as a musician until he turned to alcohol. Carlos covered his face in his hands as he was remembering all the bad decisions he made. He became emotional and started to tear up thinking about what his life would look like if he didn't let alcohol become such a big role in his life. He said how he stopped letting people in and alienated himself from his family and friends. Carlos wants to be a musician again but doesn't want to chase after his dream because he has not gotten over the failure of losing his previous job. The story he told me about himself was so strong in his mind that it had become his identity. After telling me his story, he asked me if I could pray for him. I said "Dear God today I met a man named Carlos. I want Carlos to feel loved and cared for everyday as any other person should feel. He has a dream of becoming a musician again so I want him to go after his dream and to never stop believing in himself. I want Carlos to seek and make friendships so he can connect with people that will be there for him to encourage him and build him up. May Carlos find strength in the days ahead so he will have the will to get to where he wants to be. Hope in the most hopeless times, hope so he can get passed the hardest days and come out on the other side with determination and steps closer to his goal I want Carlos to know I care and that I will continue to pray for him. Thank you for giving us this time together. Amen. As I look up at Carlos he had tears streaming down his face. His face was filled with the deepest gratitude I have ever seen. He pulled me into a tight embrace and said Maggie you made not only my day but my week, you are very different in the best of ways from anyone I have ever met. You are one special girl. I was very touched and moved by his words towards me as I was the one that was supposed to come here to change and help others and yet in this moment, I was the one changed by this very compassionate man. Carlos repeatedly thanked me and then we parted our ways. In the hope of meeting Carlos again, I would have to say that I should have thanked him for the impact his presence and words had on me. Our brief meeting has had a lasting effect upon me. During this Lenten season Shannon White continuously talked to us about the message from Jesus of The New Covenant "to love one another as I have loved you". It is such a simple task and yet so powerful as I witnessed firsthand with my encounter with Carlos. Every time I participate in Midnight Run my faith is enriched through the understanding of the importance of human kindness and the way in which Jesus wants us to live our lives according to the way he lived his.

God's divine joke is that death is not the end, no matter how humankind wants to try and figure it all out. The foolishness of the Gospel blasts all of our analyzation right out of the water. Instead, we encounter the loving

and living Christ whenever and wherever we open our eyes and carry that love to others. For Maggie, chances are, she saw the risen Christ in Carlos. For Carlos, well, the Risen Christ came to him in Maggie.

"It happens to all of us," Nadia Botlz-Weber concluded one Easter Sunday morning. "God simply keeps reaching down into the dirt of humanity and resurrecting us from the graves we dig for ourselves through our violence, our lies, our selfishness, our arrogance, and our addictions. And God keeps loving us back to life over and over."

Praise God for that! Praise God that we experience the renewal of life day after day after day. Alleluia! Christ is Risen!