

(Holy Humor Sunday)

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Holy Humor Sunday

John 20:19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the authorities, Jesus came and stood among them and said: 'Knock, Knock.'

The disciples responded: "Who's there?"

Jesus responded: "Jesus".

The Disciples said: "Jesus who?"

Jesus: "I have only been gone three days and you forget me?"

Jesus said: "Knock, knock."

Disciples: "Who's there?"

Jesus: "Orange"

Disciples: "Orange who?"

Jesus: "Orange you going to let me in?"

Jesus: "Knock, knock."

Disciples: "Who's there?"

Jesus: "Adore."

Disciple: "Adore who?"

Jesus: "Adore is between us. Open up!"

Jesus: "Knock, knock."

Disciples: "Who's there?"

Jesus: "Notice how I didn't need to knock!"

It is said, "Laughter is the best medicine." I think most of us would agree. As I said last year, quoting Jimmy Buffett - "If we didn't laugh, we would all go insane."

Buffett is right, except most of us would agree, death is no laughing matter. It is perhaps the saddest and most difficult thing we all face, and we all do face it, in life.

The writer of Ecclesiastes very famously says: "There is a time to weep and a time to laugh." (Chapter 3:3)

Death is a time for weeping, not laughing and Jesus is dead or at least that what the disciples still believed. Sure they had heard the news Mary Magdalene who claimed she had "Seen the Lord."

Such unbelievable news might have only added to their fear. So as the light of this new day fades, and darkness spreads, we find the disciples huddled together, hiding behind a locked door, fearing for their lives, while trying to process what Mary Magdalene has told them.

"Knock, knock!" If you are into suspenseful thrillers, you can image how the high the disciples might have jumped had someone suddenly knocked on the door asking to be let in.

"Knock, knock!" Don't answer it! Had Jesus knocked, I bet they might have wet themselves with fear!

But he didn't knock. John says, while darkness surrounded them, and fear filled them, and with the doors locked, the Risen Christ stood among them, and said: "Boo!"

Okay, that really would have sent them all through the roof! What Jesus said to them was: "Peace be with you."

And the disciples, depending on the translation, were - "overjoyed" "glad" "exuberant" or "rejoiced"!

You have to wonder if they also didn't laugh too. When you are overjoyed or rejoicing at wonderful news, wouldn't you smile and laugh a little?

In his article - "The Jesus Who Laughed" - Miles Townes says: **"It is neither a stretch nor a slight to say that the resurrection was a joke—and a good one. What more could Jesus have done to mock the world that killed him than rise from the dead?"**

The Psalmist proclaims: **"God has turned my mourning into dancing, my sorrow into shouts of joy!"**

We might add our tears of grief into belly laughs too!

And why not, we are an Easter people. We know the Good News to be true, so why not laugh and celebrate? Well because we are after all, Protestant Presbyterians who are the "Frozen Chosen". Are we allowed to laugh?

Our Protestant ancestors didn't much care for laughter in church. According to Miles Townes, "One reason we miss jokes in the Bible is our Puritan tradition of disdain for levity, which tends to frame the things Jesus says as pithy ripostes or clever aphorisms—but not jokes."

He adds: "There is a logic to this: we have no problem being fully human but struggle to be godly, so we should focus on what is godly about Jesus."

The funny thing is, Jesus jokes all the time, just not in the way we think of the "class clown" or a stand-up comedian. He is serious, but uses the humor of his day to make points in his parables and teachings. As Townes says: **"A joke need not be frivolous or false, and in fact the best jokes are neither."**

I will admit, I am no expert on biblical humor. If Jesus is making a point with a joke, I miss it too.

Then again, I wonder if Thomas missed out on the joke as well? He wasn't in the room "where it happened". You have to imagine that while the other disciples might have been still filled with joy and laughter, Thomas found no humor in the situation.

I think we might all be a bit like Thomas when we miss the joke.

Miles Townes says: **"the ability to tell good jokes (and get them) is deeply tied to our moral imagination."**

In that way, Thomas imagination was limited to his reality. Jesus was dead and unless he could see for himself, he just couldn't see what caused the others to laugh with joy!

Have you ever been told a humorous story, and for some reason, while everybody else seemed to “get it” and laugh. You just stood there in silence, looking at everyone else, wondering what was so funny? And then a day or two, maybe a week passes, and all of sudden you burst out laughing because you finally “got it”.

Thomas is in that exact situation. A week passes and then, Thomas finally gets in on the joke. Jesus is not dead, but risen and is fully alive in his midst!

One wonders if Jesus didn't throw his head back in laughter, as he holds out his hands, inviting Thomas to see and believe!

And in seeing and believing, I would love to believe that Thomas too starts to laugh!

Miles Townes notes that - **“A good joke in the functional sense depends on our ability to see the difference between the world as it is and as it could be. A good joke in the moral sense, then, depends on our ability to see the difference between is and should. A good joke can light up the dark between the two, can help us see one from the other. Not everything that is funny is a joke, and not every funny joke is a good joke, but a good joke helps us see the distance between who we are and who we should be.”**

This past Easter Sunday, we laughed, a lot, at the joyful celebration our children led us in by blowing their horns, waving our colorful wands, and talking about some of the “April Fools’ Day” jokes they pulled, including the April Fools’ joke I pulled with an empty “Alleluia Box”.

Why shouldn't we laugh? We are an Easter people - not just once a year on a Sunday morning, but every day from now on!

As Townes says: “...we live in the light Jesus brought to the darkness between what is and what should be.”

The joke is on death, and it's a good one too, it's called Life!

That is, John tells us in verses 30-31, why he wrote his Gospel story, so we too might get in on the joke!