

"A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to..."

April 8, 2018

Acts 4:32-35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

1 John 1:1-2:2

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

It's good to be back from a few post-Easter days in NC. I bring you greetings from my family and on the way back the other day we stopped and spent a little while with Joe and Libby McJunkin who expressed their love for HUPC and how much they miss being here for Holy Week and Easter Sunday.

The 40 days of Lent, the events and services of Holy Week and our very exuberant celebration of Easter is over. And it was exhausting. There's so much energy expended in the attention to detail in all of those services that we're left, kind of like the disciples, still buzzing from the good news but not quite sure what to do next. It's kind of like the physical let down we have when the adrenalin and the excitement are removed. When I came by here yesterday it was kind of eery. Like the place was in a kind of post-easter suspended animation. A lot of things were just as they were left last Sunday after all was said and done in a kind of, 'oh yeah, we'll get right on that' feeling. After resurrection news, we, just like the first followers of Jesus, are looking for direction, for some inspiration, for some energy after the ordeal to begin, or to resume, being the church. We need a little pick me up.

Rylan stands up and says in a loud happy voice:

Rylan: Hey, Dr. Dave. I've got a joke that might help.

Dr. Dave: Sure, Rylan, why not?

A man was happily driving along the highway, when he saw the Easter Bunny hopping across the middle of the road. He swerved to avoid hitting the Bunny, but unfortunately the rabbit jumped in front of his car and was hit. The basket of eggs went flying all over the place.

The driver, being a sensitive man as well as an animal lover, pulled over to the side of the road, and got out to see what had become of the Bunny carrying the basket. Much to his dismay, the colorful Bunny seemed to be dead. The driver felt guilty and began to cry.

A woman driving down the same highway saw the man crying on the side of the road and pulled over. She stepped out of her car and asked the man what was wrong.

"I feel terrible," he explained, "I accidentally hit the Easter Bunny and I think I killed it. There may not be any Easter eggs because of me. What should I do?"

The woman told the man not to worry. She knew exactly what to do. She went to her car, opened the trunk, and pulled out a spray can. She walked over to the limp, lifeless Bunny, and sprayed the entire contents of the can onto the little furry animal.

Miraculously the Easter Bunny came to back life, jumped up, picked up the spilled eggs and candy, waved its paw at the two humans and hopped on down the road. 50 yards away the Easter Bunny stopped, turned around, waved and hopped on down the road another 50 yards, turned, waved, hopped another 50 yards and waved again!

The man was astonished. He said to the woman, "What in heaven's name is in your spray can? What was it that you sprayed on the Easter Bunny?" The woman turned the can around so that the man could read the label. It said: "Hair spray. Restores life to dead hair. Adds permanent wave."]

Well, o.k. Today is called "low Sunday" and in an ever increasing number of churches it is also known as Holy Humor Sunday. Before you get the idea that it's just another preacher gimmick to get people in the pews on the Sunday after Easter, it seems that long ago in the Greek and Slavic churches the Sunday after Easter was celebrated as "Bright" Sunday as the church acknowledged the resurrection appearances of Jesus on the two consecutive Sundays of Easter as something to be embraced with great joy.

Jesus appears, offers peace, imparts the Holy Spirit and a week later returns and does the same. Thomas who wasn't there the first time is challenged the second time to touch and see Jesus. We, looking on, all

these years later, who believe without seeing, have a similar experience. We, all these years later, do our best to hear, believe, and embrace the truth of resurrection.

Kaitlyn interrupts and says: Hey, Dr. Dave speaking of telling the truth did you hear about the **Presbyterian minister, we're not saying it was you Dr. Dave, who was walking down the street when he saw a group of about a dozen kids, all of them between 10 and 12 . They were standing around a ragged looking old dog. The minister was concerned that the dog might be hurt of something and asked the kids, "what's up with the dog?" One of the kids told him, "Somebody just left this great old dog here on the street. We all want him, but only one of us can take him home. So we've decided that whichever one of us can tell the biggest lie will get to keep the dog."**

The minister said, "You boys shouldn't be having a contest telling lies!" He said, "Don't you boys know it's wrong to lie," and then said, "when I was your age, I NEVER told a lie." There was dead silence for about a minute. The kids all looked at each and kind of nodded. Just as the pastor was beginning to think he'd gotten through to them, the smallest boy gave a deep sigh, handed him the leash and said, "OK, you get the dog."

OK. The idea is simple, after Easter, after being caught up in the sadness, in the dilemma presented to us by the death of Jesus and our own struggle with sin and pain and trouble, we have been released by Easter joy to live in peace, and challenged to live in the light and the truth of the resurrection. We embrace a story that for most of the world is a whopper of a lie, or at least the misguided notion of people overcome with grief.

Because of that dynamic tension, between faith and fact and fable we have to live without taking ourselves so seriously because that which is most serious, our serious problem with sin and death, has been eradicated and we are invited to leave that upper room and to live in joy! We have a great story to tell. We just need to make sure we have the story right. The story entrusted to us by God.

_____ says: Hey, Dr. Dave. DO you remember that Sunday after church when you were shaking hands with everybody when that nice lady said, "That was a wonderful sermon today, Dr. Dave!" Remember? You kind of blushed like you are now and you said, all modest like, "Oh, it wasn't me, it was God." Remember what she said Dr. Dave? She said, "NO, It wasn't that good."

Obviously, it isn't all that easy. Jesus comes, offers peace and blows some Holy Spirit on the disciples and a week later they haven't budged an inch. They are living inside the story but they seem to be but just don't quite

seem to get it yet. We get to hear the story, hopefully faithfully told and retold and told again, but we, too, spend a lot of time stuck in the same sorrow, the same dilemma, the same wilderness of being lost. Jesus has come to offer us a way out. He has come to reintroduce us to the banquet. He has come to usher us out of our upper room of self chosen wilderness on a Holy Spirit filled adventure of peace and joy and happiness. He wants us, you and me, as we heard on Easter, out in the world seeking and sharing good news. That's not easy.

_____ : **Hey, Dr. Dave. Did this ever happen to you?**

A Presbyterian pastor talked his property committee into putting those sanitary hot air hand dryers in the rest rooms at the church in the name of better hygiene. After two weeks he requested that they be removed. When the property committee asked him why he confessed that they worked fine but then he went in there he saw a sign that read, "For a sample of this week's sermon, push the button."

Hot air just isn't enough. At least not ours. When we put up barriers, hide behind doors, refuse to believe because of our doubts, make our Thomas like declarations "I refuse to believe until I can touch the wounds...", live in fear of all sorts of known and unknown foes, lock ourselves into our sorrow...in other words choose the wilderness. Jesus comes through closed and locked doors, greets us warmly, offers us peace, blows a breath of fresh

air on our frustrations and sorrow and doubt and fear so that believing in him we may have life in his name.

The goal is to embrace what 1 John embraces. "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us... We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

Jesus steps into this room today, a room of the scared modern day disciples unsure of our next leap of faith and offers us the gift of peace. He fills us with his Spirit of joy. He calls us to be a people of joy.

It is truly something to be happy about. It has been said that the reason for holy humor is that God played the ultimate joke, *Risus Paschalis* ('God's Joke,' or 'the Easter laugh' on the old foe death by raising Jesus from the dead. What, by even the rules God established, shouldn't happen, couldn't happen -- happened.

And if, in the power of God, death can become life then why can't sorrow become joy? Why can't hate become love? Why can't hunger become plenty? Why can't intolerance become tolerance? Why can't cruelty become kindness? Why can't war become peace? Why can't the uncivil become the civil? If death can be overcome with life, why can't people just get along? Why can't there be more solutions than problems? Why can't there be more singing than shouting? Why can't there be more banquets than treks through the wilderness? Why not more laughs than tears?

Acts reminds us of what the church, our church is supposed to be about, what we, in our Post-easter lives should be. It says, "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

Were these people happy? Were they filled with joy? When Jesus said, "peace be with you." When the Holy Spirit comes to us. When we are challenged to go into the world. When we know that our redeemer lives. There is joy. There is holy humor.

Mackenzie interrupts: Hey, Dr. Dave, that was kind of long. Are you finished? We've got things to do.

Dr. Dave: I'm done.

Mackenzie: Good, it reminds me of that day, after another very long sermon, everyone was leaving church and nobody had much to say. Then along came that nice lady, you know, the one from before, who always says something nice. Remember what she said?

Dr. Dave: I'm afraid to ask.

Mackenzie: She said, "Dr. Dave, today your sermon reminded me of the peace and love of God!" You were sooo happy!! You said, "No-one has ever said anything like that about my preaching before. Tell me why." You shouldn't have asked Dr. Dave. She said, "Well - it reminded me of the Peace of God because it passed all understanding --- and the Love of God because it endured forever!"

Enough said. No really. Enough said.