

Isaiah 25:6-9
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Acts 10:34-43
John 20:1-18

Today is a first for me in my forty years of preaching; the first time I preached an Easter sermon on April Fools' Day. Since 1700, Easter has fallen on April Fools' Day only eleven times. The last time Easter fell on April Fools' Day was 1956. It will happen again in 2029, 2040, and then not until 2108. How appropriate for Easter to fall on April Fools' Day for on this day we celebrate the central event of the Christian faith, the Resurrection, and the Resurrection was a joke. By "joke" I don't mean something that is ridiculously inadequate, such as "congress is a joke." Rather, by joke, I mean a trick played on someone. "What more could Jesus have done to mock the world that killed him than rise from the dead?" as Miles Townes, a Presbyterian elder wrote. Let me repeat that again: "What more could Jesus have done to mock the world that killed him than rise from the dead?" When God raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus mocked the dark powers of the world, the powers that thought they had the final say. Jesus tricked them. The resurrection is a joke on them. Jesus, when God resurrected him from the dead, had the last laugh, the final say. God, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, overcame the powers of darkness; God destroyed the demonic powers, including death, what Paul calls the last enemy.

You may be one of those people who enjoys playing a good joke, a prank, on someone, especially on April 1. There's the caramelized onion prank. Dip apple-sized onions in caramel, poke a stick in them, and serve them to office workers who think they're biting into an apple. April fool! The BBC once broadcast a short documentary in a current affairs series purporting to show Swiss farmers picking freshly grown spaghetti in what they called the Swiss Spaghetti Harvest. The BBC was later flooded with

requests to purchase a spaghetti plant, forcing them to declare the film a hoax on the news the next day. April fool! There have been plenty of times my twin brother have played a joke by having people think it is the other one. April fool.

On this Easter Day, who is the April fool? Was it Annas the high priest, and his toady son-in-law, Caiaphas. Annas is a dark, malevolent figure in this Holy Week drama. He has had enough of this Jesus. He has corrupted witnesses, falsified evidence, placed a mole inside of Jesus' inner circle, tracked the movements of this radical insurgent and bided his time. But now, with Passover approaching, he must make sure Jesus is dead and buried and quickly! He pulls the strings. He plays Pontius Pilate like a West Virginia fiddler. He gets what he wants. But now, Annas, it is Easter morning and Jesus is risen. April fool!

Was it Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Israel? He was the one who cowered in the face of certain religious leaders who said that failing to deal harshly with a treasonous villain like Jesus would not be viewed favorably by Rome. Only the Romans could execute Jesus. The religious leaders did not have the authority to execute. They had to talk Pontius Pilate into doing it. He permitted the execution, and not only permitted it, but allowed it to happen in the name of the emperor. He is the one who washed his hands of the whole affair. But now, Pontius Pilate, it is Easter morning and Jesus is risen. April fool!

Was it the soldiers? They're simply cogs in the cruel and oppressive Roman industrial military complex. The Romans were cruel, oppressive, and did not ignore anyone who was foolish enough to challenge the system. They were employed by the Romans to keep the Israelites obedient with violence, such as crucifixion. The

crucifixion was a most terrible way to die. One could hang on that cross for days. The Romans made crucifixions public. It was their way of declaring, this is what happens to those who dare to instigate any kind of revolt against the Romans. But now soldiers, it is Easter morning and Jesus is risen. April fool!

Perhaps the greatest fools are all of us. Certainly, much of the world believes we're crackers, that our elevators don't go all the way to the top floor, that we are a few cards short of a full deck. They think of us as completely foolish souls who need Jesus and religion as some sort of an emotional crutch. There may be those who even consider themselves religious who think we committed followers of Jesus take things too seriously. Love your enemy. Turn the other cheek. Feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, care for the sick, visit those in prison. We who love Jesus, who follow his teachings, who obey his word, are regarded by many as fools. But now it is Easter morning and Jesus is risen. April fool!

According to most contemporary observers, Jesus may seem to be the fool. Jesus acted in foolish ways. He eschewed a comfortable lifestyle. He declared that foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. For friends he had tax collectors, hookers, lepers, fishermen, the poor, and needy. Not a CEO or a community leader among his inner circle. He shunted angel investors, and instead told them to give away their wealth and follow him. He knew that here is power in being a somebody, but there is truth in being a nobody. He opted for the truth, for he knew that power emerges from the truth. He chose weakness instead of strength, vulnerability instead of aggressiveness, truth instead of practicality, honesty instead of influence. He stuck his fingers in the eyes of religious authorities and often seemed to

deliberately bait those who had the power to kill him. And then they did. They think they have the last word. But now, it is Easter morning and Jesus is risen. April fool!

On this day, Easter Day, it is April Fools' Day. The resurrection is a joke on all the dark powers, demonic powers, of the world. The resurrection made fools out of the dark powers of the world. The resurrection makes a fool of death itself. The violence and threats governmental leaders use to restrain others and to maintain their own power. The violence that governments use to dominate others and to maintain their hold on power. The violence used by the drug cartel to sustain their lucrative but destructive business. The power abused by the wealthy, fueled by their greed to have more, with no regard for others. The power abused by corporations, so that the bottom line remains black and grows. As Charles Campbell wrote, "Rather than serving the ends of human life, the powers now exercise dominion over human beings, restricting, controlling, and consuming human beings 'in order to sustain and extend and prosper their own survival.'" All these powers bring death. These are all enemies. And, as Paul wrote, the last enemy to be destroyed is death. Paul writes about all the demonic, dark powers of the world, and one of these is death. As one commentator wrote, "Because of Easter, we celebrate Jesus as conqueror and look for his victory over all that destroys and damages God's world. He will rule over his enemies, and he means his people to rejoice in his reign." The dark powers of the world, the demonic powers, the power of death, do not have the last word. But now, the dark powers, the demonic powers, the last enemy death, it is Easter morning and Jesus is risen. April fool!

All authority and power and dominion
to the name that is above all names—
Jesus Christ our Lord—
now and in the age to come. Amen.