

“Amazing April Fooling!”

B, Easter; John 20:1-18; Mark 16:1-8
April 1, 2018; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
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The Resurrection

16 ¹⁻³ When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so they could embalm him. Very early on Sunday morning, as the sun rose, they went to the tomb. They worried out loud to each other, “Who will roll back the stone from the tomb for us?”

⁴⁻⁵ Then they looked up, saw that it had been rolled back—it was a huge stone—and walked right in. They saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed all in white. They were completely taken aback, astonished.

⁶⁻⁷ He said, “Don’t be afraid. I know you’re looking for Jesus the Nazarene, the One they nailed on the cross. He’s been raised up; he’s here no longer. You can see for yourselves that the place is empty. Now—on your way. Tell his disciples and Peter that he is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You’ll see him there, exactly as he said.”

⁸ They got out as fast as they could, beside themselves, their heads swimming. Stunned, they said nothing to anyone.

I. APRIL FOOL’S—HEAR IT NOW

Happy Easter! Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! We were having a discussion at a music rehearsal this week about words, music and silence. It seems several musicians, starting with Mozart, have deemed the “space *between* the notes” or the rests between the words, as the most important thing of all! It is in the silence, not the words or the sounds, that the meaning is to be found.

Mozart: “The Music is not in the notes but in the silence between.”

Miles Davis: "In music, silence is more important than sound."

Artur Schnabel put it: *The notes I handle no better than many pianists. But the pauses between the notes – ah, that is where the art resides.*”

This truth also was also brought to life in a powerful way this week when Emma Gonzalez, a witness to the horrific Parkland shootings, spoke a monumental message in her 6 minutes, 20 seconds of silence.

And so, after hearing about this profound power of silence all week and our musical conversation on Friday and pondering this wisdom—ancient and new, I took it to heart.

Here’s your sermon for today.....PAUSE

Okay. April Fool’s!

II. TRUTH OR FOOLING?

Yes, I do believe that the most wisdom likely *is* to be found in the silence; in the quiet between the words, and in the rests between the notes. But, it’s also a day of proclamation, of “the greatest story ever told!” And Jesus told the disciples—even though they didn’t all listen or do what he said!—to “go and tell!”

And so, we tell! With our words and songs, as well as our thoughtful silence and prayerful living. Both/and.

Today is *also* a rare and unique occurrence in our human history. Both Easter Sunday *and* April Fool's Day!

So, let's have some fun. Since you're not getting a silent sermon! Let's play a little: "Truth or Foolin'"
(Hey, my colleague in Denver actually piped in a laugh track for this sermon today! It's okay to have fun in church!)

Truth or Foolin':

*Easter is *always* on April Fool's Day—we just haven't paid much attention to it before!

(False: Easter and April Fool's haven't coincided since: 1956 and won't happen again until 2029.)

*Ash Wednesdays always falls on Valentine's Day.

(False: Hadn't happened in 149 years before this year!)

Mary was the only one at the tomb.

(True AND false: depends which gospel you read!)

*We should try to harmonize the Gospel stories so they agree.

Or, we should pick our favorite one and never look at the others.

(False: we must read them all, for they are *all* incredible accounts of an incredible event—seen through different eyes and told by different voices.)

*April Fool's came into being when, in the 4th century, Emperor Constantine called the bluff of a court jester named Kugel, who said he could do a better job of running the empire. So, Constantine, amused, allowed this Jester named Kugel to king for one day.

"Kugel passed an edict calling for absurdity on that day, and the custom became an annual event."

Truth or Fooling?

April Fool's! Even *that* story was made up by a professor at Boston University!! And a *lot* of people fell for it. Truth is, there are all *sorts* of theories about the origins of this day, not unlike the numerous accounts of Easter morning, even in the written gospels!

We don't really *know* where it came from. And we don't really *have* to, do we? Can we live with a little mystery, and just enjoy the fun and fooling of the day?

It happens—it's not fake news. It really happened once, a long time ago, and it really happens every year, and *more* than once a year.

III. NO FOOLING ABOUT EASTER

We heard the story from the Gospel of John this morning. A lone figure, Mary, goes to the garden, and we hear what happened to her there, and what she does with the news.

Now let's hear from the Gospel of Mark. Note the differences—in the characters and what happens at the end. (Read Mark 16) – part of the mystery!

This is *not* an April Fool's trick by the gospel writers, exactly, but enough to give us pause if ever we think we "know the way it was".

Because, we fool ourselves sometimes. Fool ourselves about more than playing some practical jokes on the First of April, like marking the eggs for the hunt as "hard boiled" when they're *not*. Or, _____ (think of the best one you heard)

Some of you may have thought someone was foolin' when you heard what time church started this morning and what time you needed to be here!

We fool ourselves when we take *anything* on face value, or believe "What everybody's saying" or what keeps getting

repeated. Or, when we read it on the internet, or heard it on the news, so therefore it *must* be true!

Easter has a foolish and funny side to it—especially when it falls on April Fool’s Day! And, it has a poignant and powerful side—for fooling ourselves at the expense of others; or saying or doing things in jest that *harm* others, like “jokes that go too far”—is *not* a laughing matter. It doesn’t mean that “people are too sensitive.” It *can* mean that bullying needs to be called out for what it is.

Nor is Jesus’ suffering and death a laughing matter, or anyone’s suffering or death, when they are just trying to live, love and share life abundantly on this earth together.

IV. EASTER HAS THE LAST LAUGH—FUNNY AND VERY SERIOUS ALL AT ONCE!

So, today, we share *all* those things. For there is a proper time to laugh and a time to lament. A time to tell Easter stories and a time to laugh at our human foolishness. And sometimes, we can do both all at the same time!

A journalist named Sean Dietrich reflected recently on his assignment “to the South”:

“It’s Easter season in the South. The dogwoods are blooming. The azaleas are pink enough to take your breath away. The pollen is sending people to the ER.

I’m covering the arrival of Easter, and it’s big in the Southeastern United States. Here, the world comes unglued. This is the time of year when small country churches get so many visitors, cars have to park on the lawn.

Sometimes, the excitement is too much for local pastors to bear.

Last year, for instance, Pastor Jeremy Parker of Greene County, Tennessee made Easter memorable for his congregation. He decided to preach a sermon while dressed like the risen Savior.

He wore a long white robe which his wife had sewn, and carried a shepherd’s staff.

His assistant pastor wanted to take things a step further. He masked the sanctuary windows with black paper and pointed a spotlight on the pastor to better portray the splendor of the risen Lord.

On Easter morning, the church was packed—standing room only. The lights went off, the church went dark. The spotlight hit Pastor Jeremy and—I’m sorry to say—*his paper-thin tunic became semi-transparent.*

The children of Israel could see his outline beneath the robe. And everyone knew without a doubt that the pastor did not believe in underpants.

Now, if Pastor Jeremy would’ve attempted this in, say, Ann Arbor, Michigan, they would’ve hauled him away to a padded cell. But this was not Michigan.

And of course, I don’t want to forget to tell you about Bishop Ricky Moore, in Shreveport, Louisiana.

A few years ago, the bishop wanted members of his congregation to experience an Easter resurrection like never before.

One deacon suggested locking the bishop in a coffin for three days without food, water, or toilet, then unlocking him on Sunday morning. Bishop Ricky loved the idea.

I know, I know. You’re probably wanting to know if the idea was a success. Well, let’s just say Ricky made the six-o’clock news.

So is this a big weekend? You bet. And why shouldn’t it be? It’s when we celebrate things we believe in, and watch them come to life before our eyes.

It’s when you can ride through rural hamlets and see wooden crosses perched in every front yard, hillside, and clapboard church.

It’s my favorite time of year. When the maintenance man from our church changes the purple cloth on the cross by the highway to a white cloth.

It's when Mama wears her hat. When Sunday dinner is big, and open to strangers. When we visit meeting houses our grandparents were baptized in.

When we sing the melodies our ancestors sang.

When girls wear brand new dresses, and boys wear neckties. It's when ministers shout, "He is risen!" And we, the redeemed of Zion, shout back—

Well, you know the rest.

So, from me and mine to you: I hope you have the happiest dadgum Easter. I wish you sweet tea, baked ham, potato salad, and all the love you can stand.

And above all.

I hope Pastor Jeremy wears **briefs** this year.

V. FOOLING OURSELVES—

I said earlier that Easter is no joke, yet sometimes we fool ourselves about its importance. Or, we get debating about what really happened, whose story is valid, or whether all these fun things—like hiding eggs and eating chocolate and bunnies and chicks all really have a place, or if they're detracting from the *real* meaning of Easter.

We fool ourselves *anytime* we think it has to be an either/or. For our Easter celebration is all these things—all celebrations of new and abundant life, and how we each find it in our own way, and I think Jesus would like it that way!

We fool ourselves in a number of ways—in this world we live in. And not always in a practical joke, fun kind of way. As we celebrate Easter's goodness, we can't forget the cross and the suffering that were necessary to get us here. For there is suffering continually in the world, and we who follow the One who died on a cross must not deny that we fool ourselves at times, and have a role to play in overcoming death and fooling, along with Jesus.

Some ways that we fool ourselves that we need to name and bring to light:

*When we think Jesus was about judgment; or who's in or who's out. If we think that Jesus is about *anything* but abundant life for *all*.

*When we don't look at the *source* of violence AND the means by which it is carried out. When we refuse to acknowledge that solving our communal problems is complex and *can only* be resolved with a both/and approach. We fool ourselves *any* time we slide into either/or thinking and especially attacking one another's ideas and even worth as human beings.

*When we offer "thoughts and prayers" as a way to avoid taking effective action or true responsibility for our inaction. Or think we can bandaid a problem and make it go away. Mary wasn't looking for tea and sympathy, or thoughts and prayers, or bandaids to cover the wounds on her beloved Friend. She wanted her Lord alive!

*When we look for the living among the dead—whether dead issues or straw arguments. Those youth who are saying "enough!" are doing that—challenging that denial. They are saying this argument is SO over. Our friends and brothers and sisters are dying. We need to look for life *and* prevent and conquer death.

*We fool ourselves when we, like Mary, think we can hold onto the Risen Christ. When we keep thinking that we can *make* Jesus Christ do and be what *our* image of a Savior is—according to *our* dictates and script.

Enough looking for the living among the dead!
Enough creating Christ in *our* image.

Maybe the greatest April Fool's trick of all, is that the Messiah, our Savior, did not and does not fit into our mold—our

construct of what Our Lord is to be. Doesn't fit into the little plastic egg like a sweet piece of chocolate.

Every time we try to create Jesus Christ in OUR image we fool ourselves and we, in a sense, keep him in the tomb, wrapped in gravecloths—unrecognizable.

VI. EASTER MUST NOT BE SILENCED!

So, how do we not be fooled? Or fool ourselves?

Be careful! The Jester might say to us, on this Easter Morning/April's Fool's Day. It's easy to be like the Disciples and deny at first, and then discredit, downplay, and dismiss this "idle tale" of the women.

To keep silence when the story *must* be told!

What would Jesus say to on this Easter morning?

Don't silence the voices. But GO and TELL!

What you have seen and heard!

Life where there was death. New life, energy, passion, good news! A message! What's YOUR message to tell on this Easter morning?

Where have you found life where there once was death? An empty tomb where once a stone blocked the entrance, and shut out the light? Marked a grave; signified death?

That, my friends, is the best April Fool's EVER!

And, it didn't just happen to Jesus Christ—one day, 2000+ years ago! It happens. Daily. Yearly, hourly even—to us. All around us.

And like the disciples—we are given a task – run! Tell!

In Mark, the women don't tell a soul what they have seen and heard! They are sore afraid! In John, Mary tells the world: "I have seen the Lord!" Which will you be? When you leave this

place today? Will you say, "Oh, that was a nice service and I really liked the flowering of the cross. Let's have brunch!"

Or, will you be an Easter Fool, being the very voice of Easter, looking for the miracle of life after death of *any* type—physical, emotional, mental or spiritual? Or all of the above?!

VII. EASTER IS NO JOKE!!

Easter is no joke! Jesus was not just "playing" dead for a few days only to surprise and startle us by jumping out of the tomb, like God pulling a rabbit out of a rock-blocked hat.

Easter reminds us that, above all, there is *mystery* here! That following Jesus and living the life of faith require us to go deeper—below the surface, to delve-in, probe the depths and explore those mysteries!

Don't take someone else's telling of the story as your gospel. Tell your *own* story! Tell what *you* discovered, as *you* came to the Garden this morning. After *you've* been in the depths, in the tomb of life's tumult and trauma. After *you've* laid your beloved one to rest and can hardly walk or talk three days later, because your heart is literally dragging on the ground.

VIII. EASTER HAPPENS

It happens. Again and again. *We* are what make Easter happen—because we have a message to tell and a job to do. To be Easter People; Easter Fools! To look for the life where there was death. To embrace the countless resurrections that happen in our lives and those around us.

To not be fooled by the false messages and values of death and destruction all around us. To laugh in the face of pain and death *alongside* one another –even when it's very hard to do.

To not put on jester masks and make a joke of living this one life we've been given to live. But to be our authentic selves, no masks, no foolin', and tell the story we've been given to tell: I have seen the Lord!

And he goes before us and walks with us—now and always.
Amen!

EASTER PRAYER

Bret Myers has written a charge—a way for us to *be* Easter Fools! And authentic! A way to look for the both/and, the more, the hope—to not be fooled by the ways of this world—the either/ors and the no ways!

Remember that resurrection is more than mere resuscitation!

It is life transformed!

It is faith in possibilities, when others are convinced of inevitability.

It is the courage to love others, when they don't love you in return...

to show compassion, when others are heaping judgment...

to live by peace, when others are being violent...

to work for justice, when others are working for wealth...

to respond with gentleness, when others are reacting with rage...

and to trust that life, well-lived, even if short-lived, is preferable to longevity without virtue.

Don't remain caterpillars when you can become butterflies!

Live beautifully! Birth goodness in all you think, say, and do!

For you are called to life abundant!

God's blessings be with you.