

Second Sunday of Easter  
Joy and Laughter Sunday  
April 8, 2018

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-4**  
**Philippians 4:4-7**  
**Luke 6:21**

### **Good Medicine**

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. – Ecclesiastes 4:1,4*

I hope you've had a wonderful Easter week. I certainly did. Close on the heels of our spectacular, **pull-out-all the stops celebration of the resurrection** last Sunday came the wedding of **Katie Casey and Tony Jaeger** yesterday afternoon. Katie grew up at Woods and has been a youth advisor, confirmation leader and Sunday school teacher. She married a great guy in Tony and **we wish them happiness and great joy** in their life together.

**Joy is the reason we are here.** Easter inspires it. You know, of course that Easter isn't over! Easter is a season that lasts 50 days. So really, **Easter is just getting started.** This is the time to let **loose our Hallelujahs.** Easter is the season to sing and celebrate our Lord's decisive victory over sin and death.

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Today is Joy and Laughter Sunday, sometimes called Bright Sunday or Holy Humor Day. It is a very old Christian practice that we Protestants adopted from the Orthodox tradition. On the days after Easter -- Greek, Russian and other Orthodox Christians gather in their sanctuaries for services of



worship that consist mainly of **Orthodox priests standing in their pulpits telling jokes**. I'm serious! These are people who wear Sakkos (sock'-os) **[slide up, please]** and Epitrachelion (epi-tra-hee'-lee-on) in their great, stone sanctuaries full of the smell of candles and incense. These are dignified men, leaning over the pulpit saying, "Did you hear the one about the..." **Those are their joke-telling faces.**

**[slide down]**

**Martin Copenhaver**, not an Orthodox priest at all, but the very Protestant president of Andover Newton seminary is the one who originally put me on to this. A few years back he shared the Bright Sunday tradition of his New England congregation. Those reserved New Englanders love to laugh and tell jokes like,

What do you call cheese that doesn't belong to you? Nacho cheese.

What do John the Baptist and Winnie the Pooh have in common? Same middle name.<sup>i</sup>

Did you hear about the two cannibals who were eating a clown? One looked at the other and said, "Does this taste funny to you?"

What is a Presbyterian? A Presbyterian is a Baptist who likes to drink but doesn't have enough money to be an Episcopalian.

Did you hear about the Calvinist who fell down the stairs? He got up, brushed himself off and said, "I'm sure glad that's over."

This one's no joke. This really happened. A long time ago, before our kids were born my husband and I lived in a manse with a big fenced-in backyard. Since we had all that space and

no other responsibilities we decided to let our Ginger, our Golden Retriever have a litter of puppies. A couple of our minister friends, David and Libby, were getting married and Tawes and I gave them one of our puppies as a wedding gift.

One Sunday morning not long after that, David stood in the pulpit of his church and preached a 5-minute sermon. He said, "I regret that the sermon was so brief today, but my dog, who is fond of chewing things, ate the rest of my sermon." This was back in the days when we would hand-write or type our sermons, before word processors.

Well, after the service a visitor who was there that Sunday from another church shook Pastor David's hand and said, "If the DeWyngaert's dog has any more puppies, please let me know. **I want to get one to give to my minister back home.**

Jokes and stories might seem like an odd way to celebrate Easter, but it is also strangely fitting. **Look at the amazing joke God played on death by raising Jesus from the grave!**

Consider what makes us laugh, why things are funny. There's not complete agreement on why we laugh. Psychologists, philosophers, theorists have written on the subject for centuries. Aristotle wrote at great length about humor. Sigmund Freud wrote a book on humor called *Jokes and the Unconscious*. I'm told that it's a stifflingly humorless book, though it does contain Freud's favorite joke:

A husband says to his wife: "Dear, if one of us should die, I think I will move to Paris."

There's no absolute agreement on what makes something funny, though we know a good joke when we hear one – and you haven't heard one yet today! In every good joke there's a **surprise**,

**something unexpected, something that catches you off guard.** The first Easter was all those things – and more: resurrection, salvation, eternal life.

I've had **Billy Graham** often on my mind lately. He told about being in an unfamiliar city for a crusade and realizing he needed to mail something so he asked a boy walking down the street how to get to the post office. After getting directions, Graham invited the young man to come to the revival that evening.

"You can hear me telling everyone about how to get to heaven," he told the boy.

The boy shook his head, "I don't think I'll be there. **You don't even know how to get to the post office.**"

The wisdom literature of the Bible is replete with advice reminding us to laugh well and often. There is a time for every purpose under heaven, says Ecclesiastes, "a time to weep and a time to laugh." If you are having trouble with the "time to laugh" spend some time around children. Babies and children laugh 200-400 times a day; the average adult laughs only about 15 times. No wonder kids have so much energy!

Maybe it's our stress or responsibility, but laughter is a stress reliever! It restores and rejuvenates us. Just Google the medical benefits of laughter. It's crazy how many there are. In John 16:33 Jesus says,

"I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face many hardships, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Laughter is good for you. Proverbs 17:22 says: "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones." Amen? Laughter is good medicine.

In Philippians 4 Paul reminds us to rejoice in the Lord always. C.S. Lewis wrote: "It is not so much the joy of the Lord we are seeking as the Lord of joy himself."<sup>ii</sup>

It was Saturday, the day before Easter, my friend Joanne was sitting at the kitchen table coloring eggs with her three-year-old son and two-year-old She told her kids about the meaning of Easter and taught them the traditional Easter morning greeting and response, "Christ is risen!...He is risen indeed!" The children planned to surprise their dad, a Presbyterian minister, with that greeting as soon as he awoke the next morning.

Easter arrived, 3-year-old little Danny heard his father stirring about in his bedroom, so the boy got up quickly, dashed down the hall. He started to shout out the good news but he couldn't remember the greeting. Finally he blurted out:

**"Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, God's back."**

A neighbor asked Joseph of Arimathea why he gave his beautiful hand-hewn tomb to someone else. Joseph replied, **"Well, he only needed it for the weekend."**

Fred Buechner, the wonderful Christian writer, has often said that the thing that caused him to give his life to God was something that a preacher said in a sermon on Sunday. Buechner heard George Buttrick say that every time Jesus is crowned as Lord and King in someone's heart, this wonderful moment takes place amid "confessions, and tears, and great laughter." Buechner

says that it was that last phrase, “with great laughter” that caused something in him to break loose and he knew – he wanted that holy hilarity in his own life. <sup>iii</sup>

It’s Easter. Death’s power is no more!

Christ is alive! So laugh and tell a joke or two. The risen Christ is loose on the earth among “confession, and tears, and great laughter. Greet the risen Christ with rejoicing and praise holy laughter.

And remember, the one who laughs last just didn’t get the joke. <sup>iv</sup>

You heard me say in this morning’s announcements that there’s going to be Town Hall Meeting after the 9:30 service today to discuss the budget for next year. One of the things on the agenda is a small raise for the staff. It’s been **quite a long time since our hard-working**

**staff had a raise**, so everyone please grab a pledge card from the back of the sanctuary today. Fill it out those pledge cards as soon as possible. We are asking that everyone who can increase by at least 5% -- if you can do more, please do. **Please be generous**

### Dedication Prayer Jokes

Because he hadn't had a raise in so long, a good and devout Woods staff member had to take a second job delivering pizzas to make ends meet.

On his first day on the job he was walking past a big construction site when he heard the workers using the foulest language he'd ever heard. He stopped and asked the man closest to him, "Do you know Jesus Christ?"

The worker bellowed to the other workers, "Hey, does anybody know Jesus Christ?" After a pause he added, "His pizza is here."

You know our Finance team here at Woods is very frugal, they can make your gifts go a long way. One night one of the elders walked into the house after a finance meeting panting and almost completely exhausted.

"What happened, honey?" inquired his wife.

"It's a great new idea we have to be better stewards of our resources," he gasped. "I ran all the way home from the stewardship committee meeting behind the bus and **saved \$1.50**."

"That wasn't very bright," replied his flustered wife. "You could have run behind an Uber and save \$10?"

The pastor of a country church had been having trouble with stewardship and tithes and offerings. One Sunday he announced, "Now, before we receive the offering, I would like to

request that the person who stole the eggs from Widow Jones's chicken coop please refrain from giving any money to the Lord. God doesn't want money from a thieving sinner."

The offering plate was passed, and for the first time in months everybody gave.

A little boy in church for the first time watched as the ushers passed around the offering plates. When they came near his pew, the boy said loudly, "Don't pay for me, Daddy, I'm under five."

The truth is, Woods provides high quality programs that nurture faith formation for kids 5 and under, and for kids and adults of all ages. Those aren't free! So please pledge today and be generous.

Let's bring our gifts to God. Let us pray.

### **Extra Jokes for Fill-in**

Little Philip was walking home in the rain with his mother following Sunday worship. It finally stopped raining as they rounded the corner, where to their surprise and delight appeared a vivid double rainbow in the sky.

"Doesn't it look like an artist painted this rainbow?" his mother exclaimed. "I bet God painted this just for you!"

"Yes," replied Philip, "God did it, and God did it left handed too."

Confused, his mother asked him, "What makes you say God did this this left-handed?"

"Because," said Philip, "we learned in Sunday School that **Jesus sits on** God's right hand."

On the way home from the Ash Wednesday service a young boy asked his mother, "Is it true, Mommy, that we are made of dust?"

"Yes, darling."

"And do we go back to dust again when we die?"

"Yes, dear."

"Wow!" said the boy. "When I said my prayers last night and looked under the bed, I found someone who is either coming or going!"

After a very long and boring sermon the parishioners filed out of the church saying nothing to the preacher. Towards the end of the line was a thoughtful person who always commented on the sermons.

"Pastor, today your sermon reminded me of the peace and love of God!" The pastor was thrilled. "No-one has ever said anything like that about my preaching before. Tell me why."

"Well," the parishioner began, "it reminded me of the Peace of God because it passed all understanding and the Love of God because it endured forever!"

"Why did the choir director slouch?"

"Because he 'heard' his 'Bach'.

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A priest, an evangelical minister, a yoga instructor and a telephone lineman went into a bar. (this is already funny!) They began discussing the best positions for prayer, while a telephone repairman worked nearby

"Kneeling is definitely the best way to pray," the priest said.

"No," said the minister. "I get the best results standing with my hands outstretched to Heaven."

"You're both wrong," the yoga said. "The most effective way to pray is in a lotus position on the floor."

The repairman could contain himself no longer. "Hey, fellas," he interrupted. "**The best prayin' I ever did was when I was hangin' upside down from a telephone pole.**"

The pastor recalls, "After a recent worship service the mother of a fidgety seven-year-old boy told me how she finally got her son to sit still and be quiet. About halfway through the sermon, she leaned over and whispered, '**If you don't be quiet, the preacher is going to lose her place and will have to start the sermon all over again!**' It worked!"

### **Before the Benediction**

The stranger approached the Stephen Minister after service and said, "I'd like you to pray for my hearing."

The SM placed her hands on the man's ears and said a passionate, earnest prayer.

**"How's your hearing now?"** the SM asked.

Looking surprised, the man said, **"Well, it's not until tomorrow."**

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<sup>i</sup> Martin B. Copenhaver, "Laughter at Easter" *Journal for Preachers*, Easter, 2007, 15

<sup>ii</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, Harcourt, Brace, 1956, 220.

<sup>iii</sup> Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey*, <http://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2017/1/26/great-laughter>

<sup>iv</sup> Copenhaver, 18.