

## John 20: 19-31

Today is the first Sunday after Easter. We all know that. But what we may not know is that many Christians observe this Sunday as “Holy Humour Sunday”. And this is not an invention by some crazy Christians. It has a long history. It was begun by the early Greek Christians. They called it “Bright Sunday” or “Holy Humor Sunday”. For centuries the Eastern Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Christians have been observing this day as “days of joy and laughter” with parties and picnics to celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

We all in life face illness, depression, emotional wounds, loss of loved ones, financial losses. So in this season of Eastertide a day set aside to have some fun is not a bad idea. Christianity is not a bland religion, and to be a follower of Christ one need not be a grumpy person.

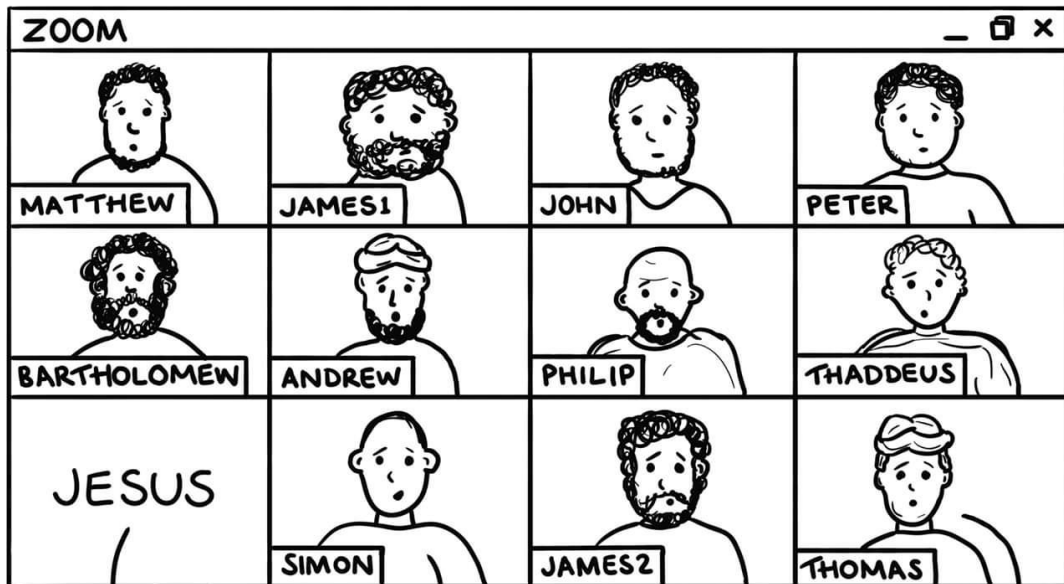
As a matter of fact some early church fathers and theologians, like Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom, offered a theological rationale for this. They said that God played a practical joke on death, Satan, and all the forces of evil by raising Jesus from the dead. “*Risus paschalis* - the Easter laugh,” they called it. It is a testament to the God who, as the Psalmist says, “sits in the heavens and laughs” (Psalm 2:4) at the foolishness of humanity and any forces that might seek to thwart divine purposes.

I read of one tradition where the priests gather on this day with cigars, brandy, and jokes to celebrate the God who does this surprising, transforming thing - my kind of Presbytery meeting.

Well, I'm not suggesting you do that but there's no doubt that the resurrection is the comedy par excellence, the unexpected reversal of expectations. The women went to the tomb to embalm a dead body. But they stumbled over the risen Lord. Resurrection reverses the expectation of gloom and doom in the face of death, and instead brings celebration. Alleluia!

So, after this long trail of despair, death and boredom for weeks we are entitled to have little bit of laughter.

And here's my contribution, two cartoons that I received from family and friends. Hope you will enjoy it.



HEY.

HOW ON EARTH IS HE IN THE MEETING?

UNLESS HE TURNS ON HIS CAMERA, I WILL NOT BELIEVE IT

Tim Wakeling

Now back to the gospel story.

They were hiding behind locked doors. That's what John tells us. In the wake of Jesus' resurrection his followers hid behind locked doors, just like we and the rest of the world are today at this very moment.

Looking back at the disciples we might think that they should have been happy, that their friend Jesus who had been killed on Friday has come alive on Sunday! You'd think they'd be having a huge welcome back party with champagne and confetti and that famous song "Tie a yellow ribbon round the old oak tree" at the background.

But no, there they are – hiding behind locked doors.

Well it is not quite surprising. Resurrection is wonderful – and I believe it wholeheartedly. But the anguish of death and its impact upon peoples' lives are pretty powerful. It doesn't need any explanation as we have been watching the news of death everyday for the last two months from around the world. Death scares us to death. It is our greatest fear, whether we admit it or not. So we lock the doors – and hide.

The disciples of Jesus were hiding from death – behind locked doors.

Not only that, John tells us they were hiding from...the Jews. And that's interesting. They were not hiding from the Samaritans or any other group of people but their own, who did not believe what they believed, and they feared that they would be persecuted by them.

I guess we all have people in our lives that we hide from. At this time of Corona virus a particular ethnic group of people are blamed for our misery and we lock them out. Perhaps that's better than spitting on their faces. People hide from people of other religions, from those who hold a different theology, from minority groups, from people of different sexual orientation, even from each other.

So next to the fear of death, we have this fear of others – the fear of strangers, people who do not fit in our nicely constructed social or economic success system, people who are not like us, and we often lock them out of our lives.

But then John shows us another "door-locking" fear in this story: the fear of facing the truth about ourselves.

I've often wondered why Thomas wasn't with the others that night when Jesus showed up. Have you ever wondered about that? I suspect it wasn't because he was just out buying some hamburgers from the local Maccas. Maybe he had given up – on God – on Jesus – on the church. He no longer believes.

Neither do many of us.

Many of us grew up with a faith that was full of quick fixes, easy answers, a religion that we thought would empower us to have more control over life and insulate us against disaster. And that was all well and good until the COVID19 came and started claiming lives indiscriminately. And that old idea flew right out the window.

If God is in control of everything, he should do a better job. How can a good and loving God do something like this to innocent people? And if he isn't in control, then what can I do?

Run away!

Run away, like Thomas!

Are you a Thomas – running away from the truth about yourself and what you no longer able to believe?

What a messed up group of disciples we meet on the evening of the first day of the week. They are hiding behind locked doors – hiding from death, hiding from others, hiding from themselves and their doubts.

Then suddenly, there is Jesus. He comes to them from nowhere. And please note, THEY didn't let him in. No one unlocked the door and welcomed him in.

He just shows up – unannounced!

To those who fear death, he says, "Peace! I'm with you."

To those who fear others, he says, "As I was sent to you, I send you to them!"

And to Thomas – Jesus holds out his wounded hands and says, "Come, touch me – face your doubt – and find the truth."

You see, there is no easy answers, no trite formulas, no enlightening theology. All we have at the end of the story is this: To those who fear death, to those who fear others, to those who fear themselves and their doubts, Jesus comes.

He simply shows up, assures them that it's okay to unlock the door and go outside; calls them to get reengaged with life; and promises his presence with them.

At the end of the story, Jesus says something wonderful to Thomas, "Because you've seen me, you believe." Then he turns to you and me, and says, "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe."

Believe what?

Only this, that the risen Lord is always with us. Amen.