

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Fear, Doubt, Peace, and Joy

Lesson: John 20:19-31

Happy Second Sunday of Easter—and Happy Holy Humor Sunday!

During the Season of Easter, we will continue to share the traditional Easter greeting. When I say, “Christ is risen” you can say, “Christ is risen indeed”

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

Today, we celebrate a wonderful truth: that God's laughter is bigger than death, and that the joke's on fear, doubt, and darkness!

And yes, you might have noticed that even our bulletin is a little upside down today. But don't worry—the worship itself is right-side up.

In celebration of Holy Humor Sunday, I'd like to share a few church jokes with you:

1. A funeral service is being held in a church for a woman who has just passed away. At the end of the service, the pallbearers carrying the casket accidentally bump into a wall jarring the casket. They hear a faint moan. They open the casket and find that the woman is actually alive. She lives for 10 more years and then dies. A ceremony is again held at the same church and at the end the pallbearers are again carrying the casket out. As they are walking, the husband calls out, "Watch out for the wall!"

2. A pastor I know has a standard liturgy for funerals. To personalize each service, he uses the Find and Replace command on his computer to replace the name of the deceased from the previous funeral with the new name. The next morning, the funeral was going smoothly until the Apostle's Creed. "Jesus Christ," the congregation read from the program, "born of the Virgin Edna..."

3. After explaining the commandment to honor your father and mother, a Sunday School teacher asked her class if there was a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters. One boy, the oldest in his family, immediately answered, "Thou shalt not kill."

4. A priest and a rabbi are in a car crash and it's a bad one. Both of their cars are demolished but amazingly neither one of them is hurt. After they crawl out of their cars, the rabbi says, "So you're a priest. That's interesting; I'm a rabbi."

Wow, just look at our cars! There's nothing left, but we're unhurt. This must be a sign from God that we should meet and be friends and live together in peace." The priest replies, "Oh, yes, I agree. It's a miracle that we survived and are here together." "And here's another miracle," says the rabbi. "My car is destroyed but this bottle of wine didn't break. Surely God wants us to drink the wine and celebrate our good fortune," he says, handing the bottle to the priest. The priest nods in agreement, opens the wine, drinks half of it, and hands it back to the rabbi. The rabbi takes it and puts the cap back on. "Aren't you going to have any?" asks the priest. "Not right now," says the rabbi. "I think I'll wait until after the police make their report."

Oh, poor priest! He's about to take full responsibility for something he might not have done!

This little joke reminds us of something very real in our lives: **mistrust and suspicion.**

And behind mistrust, what do we usually find?

Fear.

The fear that if I open my heart, I might get hurt.

The fear that if I trust someone else, they might take advantage of me.

The fear that if I show my true self, it might cost me—my reputation, my security, even my life.

And ultimately, the root of these fears comes from death itself.

So what do we do?

To defend and protect ourselves, we close the doors.

We lock them—sometimes literally, sometimes just in our hearts.

And this is exactly what the disciples were feeling in today's Gospel lesson.

After Jesus was crucified, all their hopes were shattered.

They had expected so much from Jesus—new power, success, maybe even positions of greatness.

But now, their Teacher was dead—and so publicly, so shamefully, in front of everyone.

(Slide 1) They were afraid that the same people who crucified Jesus would come for them next. So they locked the doors. And not just the physical doors to

their house.

They locked the doors to their hearts. They were living behind walls of fear, suspicion, and heartbreak.

And after Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples. And what does Jesus do? Did He say, “Shame on you for running away” Or, “Why didn’t you believe?”

No. He didn’t.

He doesn't criticize them.

He doesn't scold them for their fear.

He doesn't demand explanations.

He simply steps into their fear—literally walks into the locked room—and says, **"Peace be with you."**

And then, He openly showed them His hands and His side.

When the disciples realized that Jesus was truly alive—that He had truly overcome death—they were no longer afraid.

They were no longer sad.

They truly understood that if they believed in and followed Jesus, they could also receive new life beyond death. That’s why they no longer had any reason to fear death. If you believe in Jesus, death isn’t the end—it’s the beginning. So why be afraid?

Friends, only Jesus can save us from death and deliver us from all our fears. He brings peace, not punishment. He brings assurance, not accusation. He brings love, not lectures.

(Slide 2) And then, we see another disciple, Thomas. Like the others, after Jesus was crucified, he was overwhelmed with despair, defeat, and fear. His intense fear of death locked the door of his room—and the door of his heart. He seemed to carry even more fear and anxiety than the other disciples. Because of that, he trusted his own experiences more than the words or testimonies of others.

This tendency earned him the nickname “Doubting Thomas” that sticks to this day. We might see him as skeptical, but maybe he was just brutally honest, and that’s why he had those doubts about Jesus.

Even when the other disciples told him they'd seen the risen Jesus and their lives were visibly transformed, Thomas didn't buy it. He basically said, "I need to see some real evidence before I jump on the hallelujah train."

But then, Jesus showed up. Every door in the house was locked tight, yet Jesus appeared right there in Thomas's room. And what did Jesus do? Did He scold Thomas? Did He say, "You're off the disciples' committee!"? No! He said, "Come. See. Touch. Believe."

Jesus met Thomas exactly where he was—with love, patience, and even a little humor.

Almost like saying, "Here's the evidence you ordered, sir!"

When Thomas touched Jesus's hands and side, he finally realized and believed that Jesus was truly alive. The peace Jesus brought unlocked the door of Thomas's heart. His doubt turned into the greatest confession: "My Lord and my God!"

You see, friends, the resurrection is the greatest divine prank on death. The world said, "Jesus is finished!" God said, "Not so fast!" The world said, "He's dead!" God said, "Just getting started!" And that's why we laugh today. Not because life is always easy. Not because we don't have struggles. But because we know that life, not death, has the final word. Hope, not fear, has the final say. Joy, not sorrow, writes the ending.

Friends, Peace be with you. Holy Humor Sunday reminds us: God has the last laugh. And that laughter is love, and life, and grace, and mercy. So today, let's laugh. Let's sing. Let's dance a little, even if we have two left feet. Let's share the joy that Christ is alive—and because He lives, we live too.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

And guess what? The joke's on death—and the victory is ours. Amen.