

Bright Sunday: A Time to Laugh and Celebrate Reading: John 20:19-31 Easter 2/B
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Today we are celebrating two special occasions: Easter II (also known as Doubting Thomas Sunday) and Bright Sunday. I will address each of these Sundays in today's sermon.

So let's begin with Thomas. It was not easy to believe in the resurrection in the 1st Century just as it is not easy to believe in the resurrection in the 21st century. Just think back to that first Easter Day. The gospel of Mark reports that the women who came to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body had difficulty believing that Jesus had been raised. The earliest manuscript of the gospel of Mark ends as follows: "*They fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*" (Mark 16)

The gospel of Luke tells us that when the women returned from the empty tomb, they told the Eleven that Jesus had been raised. "*But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.*" Then later that day, two of those disciples were on the road to Emmaus. Downtrodden and grieving, they took the seven-mile journey from Jerusalem where they were joined by the risen Christ. However, they did not recognize Jesus until he was at the table with them, took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them. "*Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.*" (Luke 24)

So it comes as no surprise that Thomas, who had not been there to witness the 1st appearance of the risen Christ with the other disciples, refused to believe that Jesus had been raised. Instead he declared, unless I see and touch the marks of his wounds, "*I will not believe.*" (John 20)

Thomas was one of those people of faith who just couldn't comprehend that God was doing something new; that death was not the end of the story; that out of the ashes of destruction, new life can and does occur. But when it comes right down to it, the resurrection isn't something easy to comprehend, at least with scientific deductive logic. It doesn't seem to pass the commonsense test. We have been brought up in a society that limits believing to visual seeing, as if the only way to comprehend reality is through our sense of sight. We are uncomfortable with mystery. We often hear people say, "When I see it, only then I will believe it."

Well Thomas was no exception. He wanted to believe in the good news of the resurrection but had too many doubts. Like many of us, Thomas was a man who was passionate about the truth. He wrestled with doubt, not to excuse his unbelief, but rather to establish a robust belief. And once he established this robust belief, he put his life on the line and went out into the world to spread the good news. That is the true mark of faith! While Thomas did experience the physical presence of the risen Christ the following week, we are not so fortunate. Our experience of the presence of Christ is often more subtle, cloaked in mystery and uncertainty. For many, resurrection is not something to "believe in" as much as it is something to observe and be taught by. After all, God appears to be resurrecting everything, all the time and everywhere. Christ is now present in word and sacrament and wherever two or three gather in his name. Christ is present here today at St. Luke's!

In the Episcopal Church, we do not require people to leave their brains at the door or to believe in 10 impossible things before lunch time. We welcome all those who ask difficult questions and struggle with issues of faith. After all, it is not doubt that threatens one's faith journey, but rather apathy. So for those of you who struggle with doubt, whoever you are, wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!

It is now one week after the celebration of Easter Sunday, when most of the candy (including the chocolate bunnies) have been eaten and the altar guild can take a breather. So what happens next? Today, I would like to continue honoring this Easter season by celebrating Bright Sunday (A.K.A. Holy Humor Sunday.) Many American churches have resurrected an old Easter custom begun by the early Greek Christians. These Christians celebrated the week after Easter as "days of joy and laughter" with parties and picnics to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. Laughter as you know, is a strong medicine for the mind and body. When laughter is shared, it binds people together and increases happiness and intimacy. Laughter can strengthen our immune system, boost our energy, diminish pain, and protect us from the damaging effects of stress. Best of all, laughter is fun, free, and easy to use. So here goes some holy humor to lighten our hearts during this season of new life and joy.

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God created Adam but he was very lonely. So God said, "I will create for you a companion, but it will cost you an arm and a leg." Adam replied: "Well, what can I get for a rib?"

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A Jewish bookie was at the races playing the ponies and losing his shirt. He noticed a Priest step out onto the track and blessed the forehead of one of the horses lining up for the 4th race. Lo and behold, that horse - a long shot - won the race. Next race, as the horses lined up, the Priest stepped onto the track. Sure enough, he blessed one of the horses. The bookie made a beeline for a betting window and placed a small bet on the horse. Again, even though it was another long shot, the horse won the race. He collected his winnings, and anxiously waited to see which horse the Priest would bless next. He bet big on it, and it won.

As the races continued the Priest kept blessing horses, and each one ended up winning. The bookie was elated. He made a quick dash to the ATM, withdrew all his savings, and awaited for the Priest's blessing that would tell him which horse to bet on. True to his pattern, the Priest stepped onto the track for the last race and blessed the forehead of an old nag that was 100/1. This time the priest blessed the eyes, ears, and hooves of the old nag. The bookie knew he had a winner and bet every cent he owned on the old nag. He watched dumbfounded as the old nag pulled up and couldn't even finish the race. In a state of shock, he went to the track area where the Priest was. Confronting him, he demanded, "Father! What happened? All day long you blessed horses and they all won. Then in the last race, the horse you blessed never even had a chance. Now, thanks to you I've lost every cent of my savings!" The Priest nodded wisely and with sympathy. "You are not Catholic are you my son?" "No, I'm Jewish." "That's the problem", said the Priest, "you couldn't tell the difference between a blessing and last rites".

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One Sunday morning, the priest noticed little Alex standing in the foyer of the church staring up at a large plaque. It was covered with names with small American flags mounted on either side of it. The seven year old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the priest walked up, stood beside the little boy, and said quietly, "Good morning Alex." "Good morning Pastor," he replied, still focused on the plaque. "Pastor, what is this?" The priest answered, "Well, son, it's a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service." Soberly, they just stood together, staring at the large plaque. Finally, little Alex's voice, barely audible and trembling with fear, asked, "Which service did they attend, the 9:00am or the 11:00am?"

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The people at Starbucks managed to arrange a meeting with the Pope at the Vatican. After receiving the papal blessing, the Starbucks official whispers, "Your Eminence, we have an offer for you. Starbucks is prepared to donate \$100 million to the church if you change the Lord's Prayer from 'give us this day our daily bread' to 'give us this day our daily coffee.'"

The Pope responds, "That is impossible. The prayer is the word of the Lord. It must not be changed." "Well," says the Starbucks man, "we anticipated your reluctance. For this reason we will increase our offer to \$300 million." "My son, it is impossible. For the prayer is the word of the Lord and it must not be changed."

The Starbucks guy says, "Your Holiness, we at Starbucks respect your adherence to the faith, but we do have one final offer...We will donate \$500 million - that's half a billion dollars - to the great Catholic Church if you would only change the Lord's Prayer from 'give us this day our daily bread' to 'give us this day our daily coffee.' Please consider it." And he leaves.

The next day the Pope convenes the College of Cardinals. "There is some good news," he announces, "and some bad news. The good news is that the Church will come into \$500 million." "And the bad news, your Holiness?" asks a Cardinal. "We're losing the Wonder Bread account!"

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"A taxi driver and a minister arrived in heaven at the same time. The taxi driver was led to a palatial suite and the minister was given a small room. "I don't get it" the minister said. "All he did was drive a cab. I was in the ministry for decades." St. Peter replied: "Up here we go by results. While you preached, people slept. While the taxi driver drove, people prayed."

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So as we celebrate this second Sunday of Easter...a time of laughter, faith, doubt, and mirth, I would like to close this sermon with a prayer we can all relate to: "Dear God: So far today, I have done all right. I have not gossiped, and I have not lost my temper. I have not been grumpy, nasty, or selfish. But in a few moments, I am going to get out of bed and that is when I am going to need a lot of help." Amen

