

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

John 20:19-31
April 7, 2024 (2nd Sunday of Easter, Year B)

Do you feel a little discombobulated? Imagine how the DISCIPLES felt? Out of sorts, inside, outside, upside down! Jesus was dead and in the tomb. And now they've JUST heard from Mary Magdalene that he's ALIVE. They didn't know WHAT to think. They didn't understand what was going on or WHY it was happening. They'd LOCKED themselves in the upper room.

This service is DESIGNED to give you a sense of how THEY felt that first Easter. Everything is all backwards and upside down. Maybe you've sort of locked YOURSELF up too.

But LOCKED DOORS can't keep JESUS out. "Jesus came and stood among them and," it SAYS, "the disciples REJOICED when they saw the Lord."

You see, JOY is what the CHURCH is supposed to LOOK like. You see it again and again in scripture. Jesus loves a good PARTY! He performed His first miracle at a wedding reception in Cana, turning water into wine. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus tells us that the overjoyed father threw a big party for his returning son. "We are going to have a feast, a celebration," the father declared, "because this son of mine was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:23-24).

I think that's one of the reasons the church grew so FAST in those first few centuries. The church was a JOYFUL place, and people wanted to be PART of a community like that.

Joy brings LAUGHTER, especially when it follows the RELEASE of a BURDEN. Ecc 3(:4) says, "There is a time to weep AND a time to laugh, a time to mourn AND a time to dance." Jesus said, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you WILL laugh" (Luke 6:21). So, considering the LOSS the DISCIPLES had experienced, I imagine there was A LOT of laughter in that upper room after Jesus appeared to them.

So today we celebrate Holy Humor Sunday. Jesus has the last laugh over death, so today we're going to SHARE some laughter – at least I HOPE so. Church members have been sending me your favorite jokes for YEARS, and today I want to share some of them with YOU.

These are old classics about God and heaven. I know you will be good Lutherans and smile as loudly as you can.

You've heard this one in a sermon before:

A man left the snow-filled streets of Minnesota for a vacation in Florida. His wife was on a business trip and was planning to meet him there the next day. When he reached his hotel, he decided to send his wife a quick E-mail. But when he typed in her E-mail address, unfortunately, he missed one letter in the address and his note was sent instead to an elderly preacher's wife. Now as fate would have it, HER husband had just passed away the day before, so when the grieving widow checked her E-mail, she took one look at the computer and let out a scream, and then fainted. At the sound, her family rushed into the room and saw this note on the screen:

Dearest Wife,
Just got checked in. Everything prepared for your arrival tomorrow.
P.S. Sure is hot down here.

A rich man decided that he actually would "take it with him" when he died, so, near the end, as he was lying in his bed, he told his wife to take all his gold and valuables and put them in the attic, so

he could grab them on his way up to heaven. She did as he asked. After he died, and they had the funeral, the wife went into the attic and found all his valuables STILL THERE where she'd put them. Shaking her head, she said, "I KNEW I should have put it in the BASEMENT."

Jesus, Moses and an old man were teeing off on the 16th hole of heaven's golf course. The 16th is a par 3 over a lake. Moses, the 1st to tee off, steps up and swings, and the ball dives right for the water. He instantly spreads his arms, the water parts, and the ball rolls across the bottom of the lake and up onto the green. The others compliment him on his shot, and then Jesus steps up for his turn. Like Moses, Jesus' ball heads straight for the water, but when it gets there, it just rolls across the surface of the lake, continuing until it rolls up onto the green. After showering him with compliments, the old man steps up to take his shot. His ball too dives for the lake, but just before it hits the water, a turtle surfaces, and the ball bounces off its back and onto the far shore. There a squirrel picks up the ball and heads for the woods. As the others begin to laugh, a hawk swoops down and picks up the squirrel. The ball falls out of the squirrel's mouth, bounces onto the green and then rolls right into the cup. Jesus turns to the old man and says, "Nice shot, Dad!"

I guess there must be a lot of sports in heaven, because there's this one too.

Two ninety year old men, Joe and Sam, have been friends all their lives. It seems that Sam is dying, and Joe comes to visit him every day.

"Sam," says Joe, "You know how we've both loved baseball all our lives, and how we went to so many games together? Sam, you have to do me one favor. When you get to Heaven, and I know you WILL go to Heaven, somehow you've got to let me know if there's baseball in Heaven."

Sam looks up at Joe from his death bed, and says, "Joe, you've been my best friend many years. If it's at all possible, I'll do this favor for you." And shortly after that, Sam passes on.

At midnight a couple of nights later. Joe is sound asleep when he is awakened by a blinding flash of white light and a voice calls out to him, "Joe.... Joe...."

"Who is it?" says Joe sitting up suddenly. "Who is it?"

"Joe, it's me, Sam."

"Sam? Is that you? Where are you?"

"I'm in heaven," says Sam, "and I've got to tell you, I've got really good news and a little bad news."

"So, tell me the good news first," says Joe.

"The good news," says Sam, "is that there IS baseball in heaven. Better yet, all our old buddies who've gone before us are here. Better yet, we're all young men again. Better yet, it's always spring and it never rains or snows. And best of all, we can play baseball all we want, and we never get tired!"

"Really?" says Joe, "That's fantastic, wonderful beyond my wildest dreams! But, what's the bad news?"

"Well," says Sam, "YOU'RE PITCHING on TUESDAY."

A Lutheran, a Baptist and an Evangelical died at the same time and each went to Heaven. Upon their arrival, they were told by St. Peter that their living quarters were not ready yet. St. Peter felt awful about the situation, and after a few moments of reflection, called Satan and asked him to put the three people up for a few days, while their rooms were being finished. Satan was unusually cordial and complied with St. Peter's request. And so, the three people literally went to hell.

A few hours later, Satan called St. Peter back and said "You have to come get them. They've got to leave".

St. Peter was surprised and asked "Why?".

Satan made a long sigh then answered, "The Lutheran is forgiving everyone, the Baptist is saving everyone, and the Evangelical has almost raised enough money for air conditioning. Out."

A man arrives at the gates of heaven, and St. Peter asks, "Denomination?" The man says, "Methodist." St. Peter says, "Go to room 24, but be very quiet as you pass room 8."

Another man arrives at the gates of heaven. "Denomination?"

"Presbyterian."

"Go to room 18, but be very quiet as you pass room 8."

A third man arrives at the gates. "Denomination?"

"Lutheran."

"Go to room 11, but be very quiet as you pass room 8."

The man says, "This is heaven; why must I be quiet when I pass room 8?"

St. Peter tells him, "Well the Catholics are in room 8, and THEY think they're the ONLY ones here.

The day finally arrived. Ole dies and goes to Heaven. At the Pearly Gates, he's met by St. Peter himself.

St. Peter said, "Well, Ole, it certainly is good to see you. We have heard a lot about you. I must tell you, though, that the place is filling up fast, and we have been administering an entrance examination for everyone. The test is short, but you do have to pass it before you can get into Heaven."

"It's only three questions. The first is this: What two days of the week begin with the letter T?"

Ole replied, "Well, gosh, that one is easy. That would be Today and Tomorrow."

The Saint's eyes opened wide and he exclaimed, "Ole, that's not what I was thinking, but you do have a point, and I guess I didn't specify, so I'll give you credit for that answer.

"Here's the second question: How many seconds are there in a year?" asked St. Peter.

Now that one's harder," replied Ole, "but I guess the only answer can be twelve."

Astounded, St. Peter said, "Twelve? Ole, how in Heaven's name could you come up with twelve seconds in a year?"

Ole replied, "Gosh, there's got to be twelve: January 2nd, February 2nd, March 2nd... "

"Hold it," interrupts St. Peter. "I see where you are going with this, and I see your point, though that wasn't quite what I had in mind....but I'll have to give you credit for that one, too. Let's go on to the third and final question. Can you tell me God's first name"?

"Sure", Ole says smiling, "it's Howard."

"Howard?!" exclaimed an exasperated and frustrated St. Peter. "OK, I can understand how you came up with your answers to my first two questions, but just how in the world did you come up with the name Howard as the first name of God?"

"Gosh, that was the easiest one of all," Ole replies. "Don't you know the Lord's own prayer? 'Our father who art in heaven, Howard be thy name...!'"

St. Peter just smiled and opened the Pearly Gates.

When Lena got to heaven, St. Peter asked her the SAME questions, but HER THIRD answer was DIFFERENT. She said, "Well, shoot, God's first name's GOT to be Andy. Haven't you heard the hymn? 'Andy walks with me, Andy he talks with me. Andy he tells me I am his own.'"

St. Peter smiled and said, "Say 'hi' to Ole for me."

So remember, you don't stop laughing because you grow old; you grow OLD because you STOP LAUGHING. So DON'T stop laughing. Laughter is a GIFT from GOD. Amen.