

While waiting in line to check out at a Christian bookstore, a man in front of me asked the clerk about a display of hats with the letters WWJD on them. The clerk explained that WWJD stands for “What would Jesus do?” and that the idea is to get people to consider this question when making decisions. The man pondered a moment, then replied, “I don’t think he’d pay \$27.95 for that hat.” <sup>1</sup>

Holy Humour Sunday, also known as Laughter Sunday, goes back a ways, to the early Greek church when in the week after Easter Sunday, Christians would get together for picnics and meals, parties and practical jokes. The week unfolded as they celebrated their joy that Jesus lived, that death had no power over life. Other early Christian writers mused that God had played the best joke on the devil yet. <sup>2</sup> In some parts of the church in the Middle Ages, like in Bavaria, it was called “risus paschalis,” or “Easter laughter.” After the somber season of Lent, pastors and congregants told and played practical jokes on each other.

The practice seems to have lost favour during the Reformation and then it was officially outlawed by Pope Clement X in the 17th century. Apparently, people were having too much fun. However, when it comes to our faith it does us, it does me especially, some good to consider the words of prolific English writer and lay theologian, G.K. Chesterton, who wrote “angels can fly because they take themselves lightly. Never forget that the devil fell by force of gravity. [One] who has the faith, has the fun.”

Here’s a joke for you. My six year old son was excited about his Halloween costume. “I’m going to be the Pope,” he said. “Ian, you can’t be the Pope,” I said. “You’re not Catholic. You’re Lutheran.” Ian hadn’t thought about that. So he considered his alternatives. After a few minutes, he asked, “Is Dracula a Lutheran?” <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reader’s Digest, *Laughter is the Best Medicine*

<sup>2</sup> Keith Simmonds, *Times Colonist*, April 10, 2021

<sup>3</sup> Reader’s Digest, *Laughter is the Best Medicine*

Today in our gospel reading, Thomas picks up the story where we left off with Mary on Easter morning. Thomas was not there when Mary went to tell the disciples that she had seen the Lord in the garden that first day after Jesus had been laid in the tomb. Thomas doesn't believe her report, or the other disciples report, that Jesus is alive. He demands proof, saying, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Thomas needs verifiable evidence. He needs to see, and touch, what the others have seen in order to believe. What Mary needed was to hear her name called out by that familiar, loving voice. Each of these resurrection stories tell us that Jesus meets his disciples, those that have and will follow him, he meets them in their need and meets them where they are; whether locked and hiding away from the authorities fearing they might be next, whether hearts and eyes are clouded by grief, whether skeptical and doubting, whether removed from that very first Easter by distance and time - the resurrected Jesus stands among them, his wounds still visible, and shares his presence and his words of peace.

Still to this day, Thomas' statement of needing to see with his own eyes and to touch with his own hands has forever given him the title 'Doubting Thomas' which as James Martin writes, "...seems unfair. Consider that his fellow disciple Peter not only doubted, but denied Jesus at a crucial juncture. Despite this lapse, he is called Prince of the Apostles and has a great basilica named after him in Rome. And Thomas had a good reason to doubt. 'Jesus come back from the dead? Are you kidding? Preposterous.' Thomas may have thought his friends labored under some mass delusion." <sup>4</sup>

I've another joke for you. Kevin was not an ideal child. He managed to get into mischief frequently, and was always trailed by his younger brother, Ken. Finally, at her wits' end, his mother took him to see their parish priest. The father decided to focus Kevin's mind on higher levels.

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<sup>4</sup> James Martin, SJ, *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*, 2014, HarperOne, New York, p.407

“Kevin,” the priest asked with great seriousness, “Where is God?” Kevin gave no reply. “Kevin, where is God?” Again there was silence. For a third time the priest asked the question, and this time Kevin bolted out of the office and ran all the way home. He burst into his brother’s room. “Ken,” he said breathlessly, “Father can’t find God and he thinks we had something to do with it!”<sup>5</sup>

Even in finding this God who walks among us, who does not remain hidden, John’s gospel tells us that fear dominates today. Right now, these apostles only remember Good Friday. Yet despite all odds, Jesus stands among them and offers them “Peace.” Peace. Because nothing is impossible with God. Peace. Because death has no power over life. Peace. Because God’s promise holds true: I am. I am, here. I am here, with you.

The preposterous message of the resurrection is, however, not only peace, but also pure joy. This Jesus, who turns water into wine so the wedding feast can go on, who sits down on the grass and hosts a picnic for about 5,000 people, who spits and makes mud and heals blinded eyes, who raises his friend back to life, who washes his disciples’ feet and teaches them that all this is done by love for love, who promises them that their sorrow will be turned to joy, this Jesus now stands among them again. Our laughter bubbles up not because we forget about the weight of the world, but because the One who carried that weight for us, carries it for us, is alive.

God has done the impossible on Easter and it is cause for joy, for laughter, for parties! Easter is the clear message of how much God delights in us, how much God loves us, and loves us into wholeness and life. And we, those apostles’ past and disciples today, get to proclaim and live out together that Christ is risen, that love overcomes fear, and that life overcomes death.

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<sup>5</sup> Reader’s Digest, *Laughter is the Best Medicine*

Here's my last joke: My first pastoral ministry was as an assistant pastor to youth at a large church in northern British Columbia. In the fall of that first year, an evangelist was having a Saturday breakfast meeting with our group. I was anxious for every detail of this event to be flawless and elegant, so the lay youth workers and I agreed to bring the last of the fall flowers from our gardens for floral arrangements. The next morning I decided to walk to church. There I was, dressed in a dark suit, a tie, hat and overcoat, walking down the street at 6:30am with a bouquet of chrysanthemums tucked under my arm. As I strolled along, a car passed me from behind. Then, as though an afterthought, the driver stopped, backed up, rolled down the window, gestured to the flowers, and said, "If you're just getting home, buddy, you'd better take her more than those." <sup>6</sup>

Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Reader's Digest, *Laughter is the Best Medicine*