

Today is Easter. This is unarguably the highest and most holy day of the Christian calendar. As holy days go, it doesn't get holier than this. And since it is April 1st, we must ask: "Who is the greatest April fool?" A whole slew of candidates come to mind.

Is the April fool Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator? He cowered in the face of certain religious leaders who said that failing to deal harshly with a treasonous villain like Jesus would not be viewed favorably by Rome. He is the one who washed his hands of the whole affair. He even permitted the execution in the name of the emperor. And now, it's Easter and Jesus is risen! Sorry, Pilate! April fools!

Perhaps the disciples are the April fools. There's no doubt that many of the disciples felt foolish as the crucifixion approached. They gave up their jobs for this Jesus. They left their homes and families to follow this man on his journeys up and down Palestine. Yes, they were witness to some phenomenal miracles and amazing events, stuff they could not explain. They pinned their hopes and their futures to a man they believed would liberate them. Then Jesus is led away as a lamb to the slaughter. So, the disciples packed up and went home. They abandoned him, betrayed him and tried to forget him. And now, it's Easter morning and Jesus is risen! April fools!

Perhaps the April fool is Annas, the high priest, and his toady son-in-law, Caiaphas. Annas is a dark, malevolent figure in this Holy Week drama. He's fed up with this Jesus. He corrupted witnesses, falsified evidence, placed a mole inside of Jesus' inner circle, tracked the movements of this radical insurgent and bided his time. But now, with Passover approaching, he must make sure Jesus is dead and buried and quickly! He pulls the strings. He trumps up charges. He plays Pontius Pilate like a West Virginia fiddler. He gets what he wants. And now, Annas, it's Easter morning and Jesus is risen! April fools!

Perhaps the April fools are the soldiers guarding the tomb. I feel for these guys. They're little cogs in the Roman industrial military complex. I don't know what they did wrong or who they annoyed to get their weekend pass revoked, but they've pulled guard duty in a cemetery. They've spent all weekend guarding the tombs of dead people! I bet they were good, decent chaps: ordinary, hardworking, foot soldiers just following orders. Guarding a dead person. And now, it's Easter morning and Jesus is risen! April fools!

Perhaps the April fool is Peter, the fisherman. Peter started out enthusiastically enough. He defended his rabbi right and left. He identified Jesus as the "Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15). He swore never to abandon his Lord. He even drew a sword against a

cohort of Roman soldiers to defend Jesus' honor. But then, Peter loses faith faster than a rock sinks in a Minnesota lake. When Jesus is captured and led away, Peter denies ever knowing him. And the man who said he would never leave Jesus, flees. And now, Peter, it's Easter morning and Jesus is risen! April fools!

Perhaps the April fool is Thomas, who thought he was so smart, so clever. He prided himself in understanding how things worked. Thomas was a curious fellow, believing there's a natural explanation for everything. When Jesus talked about going "to prepare a place" for them, Thomas asked, "We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (John 14:5). When his colleagues asserted that Jesus lived, Thomas demanded to see the evidence. "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" (John 20:25). And now, Thomas, it's Easter morning and Jesus is risen! April fools!

Perhaps we are the greatest fools of all. Certainly, much of the world believes we're nuts, completely foolish souls who need Jesus and religion as some sort of emotional crutch. I think it's fair to say that a large percentage of the general population, even those who identify themselves as religious, think that we Christians take this Jesus way too seriously. We who love Jesus, follow his teachings, and obey his word are regarded by many in the world as the real fools. The April fools.

And, often, they may be right! Maybe we are the Easter fools in the sense that we claim to believe but behave as though we don't. We affirm a belief in the resurrection of Jesus. We declare that "He is risen!" But we live as though Jesus were still in the tomb, cold and decaying, unable to affect any real change in our lives. We affirm our belief with our lips, but do not confess Jesus as Lord with our lives. We are indeed the fools. And now, friends, it's Easter morning and Jesus is risen! April fools!

So, who is the biggest April Fool? It's not Pontius Pilate, it's not the disciples, it's not Annas the high priest, it's not Peter or Thomas, and it's not you or me. The greatest April fool is, in fact, Jesus himself. Jesus is the Great Fool of Easter, the Divine Trickster, the Mighty Practical Joker. Jesus is the one who called the devil's bluff in the greatest jest of all time.

Even during his ministry, Jesus acted in foolish ways, according to most contemporary observers. He avoided a comfortable lifestyle. Jesus counted tax collectors, harlots, lepers, fishermen, the poor and the needy as his friends. There wasn't a single CEO or a captain

of industry or a billionaire among his inner circle. Jesus shunted aside investors and instead told them to give away their wealth and follow him.

Jesus knew that there is power in being a somebody, but that there is greater truth in being a nobody. He opted for the truth because he knew that real power emerges from God's truth. Jesus chose weakness instead of strength, vulnerability instead of aggressiveness, truth instead of practicality, honesty instead of influence. Jesus stuck his finger in the eyes of religious authorities and deliberately baited those with the power to kill him. And then they did it: they killed him. But death could not hold him. The grave could not contain him.

On Easter Fools' Day, *"God made foolish the wisdom of the world"* (1 Cor. 1:20). Jesus was God's Fool, *"a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks,"* whereby God reconciled the world to God's Self (1 Cor. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:18).

Today we foolishly celebrate, because Jesus is alive! He who *"for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Heb. 12:2). It was Jesus who *"emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness, and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross"* (Phil. 2:6-8). Pretty foolish, it would seem. But we know this is not the end of the story. *"Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, ... and every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Phil. 2:9-11).

On this Easter Fools' Day, perhaps this is what we have an opportunity to do: As fools for Christ, as God's fools, we might consider in humble reverence reaffirming our allegiance to the one who pulled off the greatest jest in history. Perhaps we might reaffirm our belief that Jesus is Lord. Quite simple, actually.

Easter Fool's Day Commitment Prayer: "Lord Jesus, many people might not think it's the smartest thing in the world to follow you. In fact, they may think I'm crazy, and that you yourself were something of a lunatic. But I have just enough foolish faith to believe that you pulled it off, that you conquered death and brought life and light to the darkened world. So, I recommit my life to you, to be your fool, as it were, to live for you, and to seek support in that company of fools we call the church. Amen."

Source: Ebben, Bert. "God's fool." Preacherexchange.com. Retrieved September 13, 2017.

The April Fool

Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018

John 20:1-18

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Today is Easter Sunday. It is also April Fools' Day. This unusual conjunction of dates cannot go without comment. In the past 318 years (since 1700), Easter occurred on April 1st only 11 times! The last time Christians celebrated Easter on April 1st was in 1956 - 62 years ago when the world was so unlike the world and culture we inhabit today. It is unusual. Although Easter falls on April Fools' Day again in 2029 and 2040, it will then not be observed April 1st for another 68 years (2108), and then not for another 62 years after that (2170). This fascinating coincidence *begs* to be noticed and mentioned.

April Fool's Day (or All Fool's Day) is a weird little holiday, the purpose of which is to play practical jokes on friends and loved ones and spreading hoaxes. Typically, a prank is played on a hapless soul who's forgotten about the perils of April 1st. When the prank is completed and the fool humiliated, the perpetrator then yells "April fool!"

Some classic pranks come to mind. There's the caramelized onion prank, where you dip apple-sized onions in caramel, poke a stick in them, and serve them to office workers who think they're biting into an apple. Or how about the outline-of-a-bug-on-a-lampshade prank: when the lamp is turned on, the silhouette of the bug appears suddenly, freaking out your victim.

The BBC once broadcast a short documentary in a current affairs series purporting to show Swiss farmers picking freshly grown spaghetti in what they called the Swiss Spaghetti Harvest. The BBC was later flooded with requests to purchase a spaghetti plant, forcing them to declare the film a hoax on the news the next day. April fools!

Not to be outdone, the Swedish national television announced in 1962 that, thanks to new technology, viewers could convert their existing TV sets from black-and-white to color: all they had to do was pull a nylon stocking over their TV screen. Reports claimed that the stocking mesh would bend the light in such a way that a color image would appear. April Fool!