

Easter 2018: The Empty Tomb

So, do you realize how rare it is for Easter to land on April Fool's day?

Like *crazy* rare.

It's been sixty-two years since the last time it happened.

Which means only *one* of your ministers remembers that day.

And because April Fool's is on Easter,

my family got really lucky this year,

because with all this Easter stuff going on,

I simply have not had the time to focus on pranking them.

Which, to be honest, I'm kind of sad about,

because I have always loved playing practical jokes on people.

In seminary -- minister school -- I was in fact kind of notorious for my practical jokes.

Yes, at Yale Divinity School -- just the *name* would indicate that you are supposed to be serious and well-behaved.

I was not.

Our dorm, which was right on the Div School quad,

had women on the first floor and men upstairs.

I pretty much tortured those poor guys.

In the middle of the night, I would tiptoe upstairs and put whipped cream on the floor in front of everyone's door.

And then Vaseline on the doorknobs.

You have to understand, the bathrooms were hall bathrooms,

so anyone sleepily emerging from their room in the middle of the night to head down

the hall would step barefoot into the whipped cream -- *not* a pleasant sensation -- then scream,

turn around to head back into their room,

and find they couldn't turn the door knob because it was Vaselined.

It's a thin line between hilarious and evil,

and after a while, my dormmates decided I had crossed it.

I returned to my room at the end of a hard day of class

and couldn't open the door.

There seemed to be something blocking it.

As it turned out,

they had talked Security into letting them into my room,

turned my bed on end and shoved it in front of the door, put my desk on top of it --
 somehow,
 and then decorated it with every item of clothing I owned.
 With the door completely barricaded, they then climbed out the window.
 And waited for me to come home.
 I **so** deserved that.

It did have a definite effect on my practical joking though.
 In that *I ramped it up*.
 Other stories for other sermons.

So here's the thing.
 April Fool's day is actually the PERFECT day for Easter.
 The perfect day.
 Because Easter starts out as the ultimate practical joke.
 The scriptures actually say that.
 Jesus' most faithful followers, a group of dedicated women,
 go to the tomb early, early on Sunday morning,
 to pay their respects.
 And when they get, there is *nothing there*.
 There is nobody there.
 There is NO BODY there.
 So they go running back to the guys, to the disciples,
 and they tell them.
Nothing there, they say.

And the scripture says:
 the men thought it was foolishness.
 They thought the women were fooling.
 You can't blame them.
 It made absolutely no sense whatsoever.
 There's nothing but an empty tomb, they were being told.
 There's no body there.
 There's nothing there.
 The men thought the women were fooling,
 but actually it was God playing the ultimate joke.
 And the joke was on death.
 The joke was on evil.

You've been pranked, says God to evil.
 The joke's on you, says God to death.
 I fooled you guys.
 There's nothing there but an empty tomb.

An empty tomb, filled with *nothing*,
 is Easter's most powerful symbol.
 Everything that the women expected to find that morning
 was no longer there.
 Death was no longer there.
 Grief was no longer there.
 Fear was no longer there.
 There's nothing there, they said to each other, amazed.
 There's nothing there, they said to the men, who thought they were kidding.
 There is nothing there, they say to us.

And do you know how important that is??
 It's *everything*.

The empty tomb, emptied of all sorrow,
 emptied of all fear and grief and loss,
 becomes for us the reminder of everything that we can let go.
 Everything that we can empty out of our spirits.
 Everything that God can take away from us,
 that we need to have taken away.

Because there are times when we are *too full*.
 When our spirits are weighed down by something too heavy,
 when our hearts are too burdened.

We are sometimes too full.
 There are times when we are filled with regret --
 for what we didn't do and should have,
 for what we did and wished we hadn't.

There are times when our souls are overwhelmed with sorrow,
 when we are awash in grief.

There are times when we are full of fear,
paralyzed by anxiety, dreams shelved.

There are times when we are full of doubt --
when it seems too hard to believe that there is light and love.
There are times when our spirits are full of darkness.

We are sometimes *too full*.

And when we come before God like that:
when our souls are *too full*,
God says it doesn't have to be like that.

With me to love you, says God,
there need not be anything there.
With me to love you, says God, don't you know:
there's nothing there.
There's nothing there.

Whatever it is that we are *too full* of --
doubt, worry, anxiety, fear, sorrow --
whatever it is that weighs us down,
ah, let it go, God says.
There is nothing left for you to fear.
There is no guilt left for you to carry.
There is no darkness that I cannot overcome with light, says God.
There's nothing there but an empty tomb.

On Easter,
God pulls the ultimate April Fool's joke on everything that thought it had a hold on us,
on everything that *we* think has a hold on us.
God outsmarts Death.
God pulls the rug out from under Evil.
God outshines Darkness.
And in the light of Easter morning,
all becomes quite clear:
There is none of that here.

There is nothing there.

Evil has been pranked.

Death has been fooled.

Gotcha, says God.

The joke's on them.

And Love -- Love wins.

Amen.