

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Easter, April 1, 2018.**

Lots of people have noted that this year Ash Wednesday fell on Valentine's Day and that Easter – today - is April Fools' Day. I don't know how often this happens, but, when it does, it probably deserves some comment. Or, maybe not. But, who are we to resist a challenge?

For the purpose of this sermon, the term April Fools' Day will refer to lots of fools with an apostrophe. Ownership in other words by many.

So, here we are – plural – observing in April, indeed celebrating, an event that some – the majority - thought was a hoax, and others – the minority – thought was confirmation that Jesus really was the Son of God. The disciples were in the minority. While many witnessed the Crucifixion, only a few witnessed the Resurrection. At the Crucifixion, most observers walked away, disheartened. And at the Resurrection, only a few felt relief and joy.

More than twenty centuries later, I'm not sure about the relative size of the "most" and the "few." My guess is that in our contemporary society there are three categories, not two. There are some who consider Easter a hoax. And there are some, including you and me, who consider Easter a confirmation. And there are many who are undecided. But many of these undecided, if not most, do not appear even curious. They're content to be undecided. Maybe a hoax. Maybe confirmation. Either way life isn't impacted much.

It is this low-impact reality that I would like to address this morning.

Even the hoaxers don't make much noise. Their influence is benign. With the exception of some parts of the world where sadly Christianity is under attack, those who believe that Jesus did not rise from the dead – the hoaxers - don't picket religious services. They don't submit angry letters to the editor. They might feel some pity for those of us who believe deeply. But they don't rub their pity in our faces.

As for the "not curious" folks, their influence is benign as well. They leave us alone. And, for the most part, we leave them alone. If they want to engage us, we're

delighted and responsive. But, if they don't take the initiative to learn more about us and what we believe, we tend to leave them alone.

I think it's fair to say that Evangelism – heralding the Good News – isn't a strength for many believers. We focus instead on our brothers and sisters in Christ. Easter is our day. Alleluia is our language. It's what we point to, and when it's over, it's what we point to again. We're family, and proud of it, and we hope that our children and grandchildren will find the same spiritual fulfillment in the Risen Lord that we do.

In short, April Fools Day seems like a non-event as applied to the Christian celebration of Easter. If people want to consider us foolish for believing in the Resurrection, so be it. We are not angry. Our faith is not shaken. As the Bible notes, what is foolishness to others is wisdom to us. We carry on, strengthened by the annual reminder that God did indeed raise Jesus from the dead, and, in doing so, raised us to new life.

Okay, so we've dealt with the unusual occurrence of two very different events sharing the same date. And we've concluded that this sharing is not a threat either to Easter or to April Fools Day. Proponents of both celebrations will carry on, without degradation of the other.

But, are we missing an opportunity here? Not a threat, but perhaps an opening. Where else, when else, is there a ready-made contrast between foolishness and wisdom? Isn't this a form of the familiar idiom "One person's trash is another person's treasure"?

For you and me, the Resurrection is treasure. For someone else, it is foolishness. Until Thomas poked his finger in the wound of the Risen Lord, Thomas was not convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead. Perhaps not foolishness – he was in the room after all with others who had seen the Lord. You can hear him talking: "Jesus died, and that was it. End of story. Why am I here?"

That's the way a lot of people, most people, felt following the Crucifixion. And that's the way a lot of people feel right now. These doubters, these persons who regard you and me as foolish because we believe in the Resurrection, are not a threat to us. But perhaps they are an opportunity for us. An opportunity to share what we regard as treasure.

Their impact on us is benign, and, if we keep our alleluias to ourselves, our impact on them is benign. But is “benign” what we are called on to proclaim? A benign world? Camps of people living unto themselves. How dull is that! How sad! How unnecessary!

We have treasure to offer. God in Christ considered us as treasure, creatures to be valued, people to be forgiven, servants to be called, lives to be raised to new life. There is something not quite right about the joy of Easter being celebrated among friends with minimal regard to those outside our believing family.

Today’s gospel passage is from the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of John. In the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter, we learn that the Resurrected Jesus is with the disciples, including Thomas, for forty days before he returns to His Father, the event we know as the Ascension. Why does Jesus wait forty days? If you’re going to leave us again, Jesus, why not get it over with?

Well, let’s see what happens in these forty days. It turns out that these days were strategic for Jesus. He takes the disciples fishing. He gives them an assignment. Fishing was not a new event for them, but the catch this time is different.

From John’s gospel: “He called out to them, ‘Friends, haven’t you any fish’ ‘No, they answered.’ He said, ‘Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.’ When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.”

If Jesus had returned to the Father right away, and not spent some resurrected time with the disciples, chances are that you and I wouldn’t be here today. The extended period, brief as it was, was critical to their sense of evangelism, their sense of mission, their sense that a benign world was not their calling.

Easter is wisdom for you and me. And it can be wisdom for those who now consider it foolishness. We have the greatest gift in the world in the Resurrected Christ. And with that gift comes a very special responsibility. One that suggests that our motto on this and every day should be “Out with the benign. In with the Alleluias.”

A shorter version of this motto is “Let’s go fishing!” Amen.

