

Sermon for April 12, 2015 (2 Pascha, Year B)
Offered by Nathan Ferrell at The Episcopal Church of Saint Mary

Texts: 1 John 1:1-2:2; Psalm 133; John 20:19-31

Title: Good News Worth a Laugh

Seeing is believing, but sometimes you just have to laugh!

Seeing is believing. That's what people say, and that's what Thomas seemed to think. And this is what the first letter of John speaks about: "What we have seen with our eyes, and touched with our hands."

But it's not always that simple, is it?

And sometimes we see only what we want to see.

This was the problem of two Irish laborers who were repairing some potholes in the road directly across from a house of ill repute, the kind that honorable men avoid.

While they were working, they happened to see a Protestant minister quickly walk up and duck into the house.

"Would ye look at that, Darby!" said Pat. "What a shameful disgrace, those Protestant reverends sinning in a house the likes of that place!" They both shook their heads and continued working.

A short time later they watched as a Rabbi looked around cautiously and then darted into the house when he was sure that no one was looking. "Did ya see that, Darby?" Pat asked in shock and disbelief, "Is nothing holy to those rabbis? I just can't understand what the world is coming to these days. A man of the cloth indulging himself in sins of the flesh. T'is a shame, I tell ya!"

Well, just a little while later, a third man, a Catholic priest – sure enough, he was seen lurking about and looking around to see if anyone was watching, and then he quietly sneaked inside! "Oh no, Darby, look!" said Pat, removing his cap and crossing himself, "One of the poor girls musta died...."

Sometimes we see things which just don't fit our pre-conceived notions.

Like a resurrected body.

This is what happened to a burglar who, late one night, broke into a house he thought for sure was empty. He tiptoed through the living room but suddenly he froze in his tracks when he heard a loud voice say: "Jesus is watching you!"

That was it, then it was quiet again. So the burglar crept forward again. "Jesus is watching you," the voice boomed again, but he couldn't see where it was coming from! Frantically, he looked all around. And there, in a dark corner, he spotted a large bird cage with a parrot inside. He relaxed a bit and asked the bird:

"Hey, was that you who said Jesus is watching me?" "Yes," said the parrot. Phew. Now he breathed a sigh of relief and asked the parrot: "What's your name?" "Clarence," said the bird.

"That's a dumb name for a parrot," sneered the burglar. "What idiot named you Clarence?"

The parrot replied, "The same idiot who named the Doberman Jesus."

Resurrection can be frightening too, you know.

Once there was a woman who looked out of her window and saw her German shepherd shaking the life out of her neighbor's rabbit. Her family did not get along well with these neighbor's, so right away she got a knot in her stomach knowing that this was going to be a disaster.

She grabbed a broom, ran outside and scared her dog off until it dropped the now extremely dead rabbit out of its mouth. She panicked. She did not know what to do! It looked like the neighbors were out (their car was out), so she grabbed the rabbit, took it inside and gave it a bath, blow dried it to its original fluffiness, combed it till the rabbit was looking as good as new, snuck over into the neighbor's yard, and then propped the rabbit up in its cage!

About an hour later, the neighbors came home and it wasn't long until this woman heard screams coming from next door.

So, trying to appear good-neighborly, she ran over and asked, "What's going on?"

“Our rabbit! Our rabbit!” her neighbor cried, shaking with fear. “He died last week ago! We buried him, and now he’s back!”

And miracles do happen. Sorry to all of you skeptics out there. Miracles do happen,... but they rarely happen when we want them to!

A priest is driving down to Manhattan to see a show and he is stopped for speeding in Connecticut. The state trooper smells alcohol on the priest's breath and then he spots an empty wine bottle down on the floor of the car.

"Sir, have you been drinking?"

"Just water," answers the priest, his fingers firmly crossed.

The trooper says, "Then why do I smell wine?"

The priest glances down at the bottle and declares, "Ah, Good Lord! He's done it again!"

And sometimes, we misunderstand the circumstances completely!

The beloved, old Mother Superior in the Irish nunnery was dying. So the sisters all gathered around her bed trying to make her last journey comfortable. They brought her some of the warm raw milk from the cows that they kept, but she refused to drink it.

Then one of the nuns remembered the bottle of Whiskey in the kitchen – given to the sisters as a gift last Christmas. She opened it and poured a generous amount into the warm milk.

Back at Mother Superior's bed, she held the glass to her lips. Mother drank a little, then a little more and before they knew it, she had drunk the whole glass down to the last drop.

Finally, they could tell that her time was approaching.

"Mother," the sisters asked earnestly, "please give us some words of wisdom before you die."

With great effort, the dying Mother raised herself up in bed and with a pious look on her face, she told them, "Don't sell that cow!"

Sometimes, everything depends on the presentation.

Communication between human beings can be a very tricky thing.

Sean was driving home with his family after the Baptism of his baby brother at the local parish, and he was sobbing and crying all the way home in the back seat of the car. Three different times, his father tried to find out what was the matter. Finally, as they were almost home, the boy replied, "Father John said that he wanted us brought up in a Christian home (sniffle, sniffle), but I want to stay with you guys!"

Lots of people have questions and doubts – like Thomas.

There's nothing wrong with that, nothing at all.

Once, a 10 year old girl had a question. She went to her mom and asked, "Mom, where do people come from?" The mom explained how God made Adam and Eve and how we all are descendants of those first people who walked with God in the beautiful Garden of Eden.

The girl thought about that and then decided to ask the same question of her dad. Sometimes parents say different things, and the dad explained that first there were monkeys living in the jungle, and they evolved into big hairy gorillas and then eventually they became people like us.

Two very different ideas! So the girl went back to her mom and reported dad's story and then asked which one was correct. The mom cleared it all up when she said, "Well, when I was talking to you, I was speaking about my side of the family, and your dad was telling you about his side of the family!"

Of course, different people can give you different answers to the same question, just as different religious traditions approach God in different ways.

Here are 3 fundamental truths about religion: Jews don't recognize Jesus as the Son of God, Protestants don't recognize the Pope as the Vicar of Christ, and Baptists don't recognize one another at the pub on Friday night!

Each faith tradition has its own peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. This is part of the diversity that makes life so interesting.

One woman died and met St. Peter who took her on a tour of heaven. They passed a pit where people are gnashing their teeth and wailing, and the woman asked, "Who's down there?"

St. Peter said, "Oh, those are the Catholics who ate meat on Fridays."

They walked a little farther and came across another pit with more groaning and wailing, and she asked, "OK, who's down there?"

St. Peter answered, "Those are the Baptists who went to dances."

And a little farther along, there was yet another pit and people down there crying and ripping their garments, and she asked, "And those people?"

And St. Peter explained, "Those are the Episcopalians who ate their salads with their dessert forks!"

Sometimes these differences cause misunderstandings which allow us to become hard-hearted toward one another.

Down in Boston, there was once a middle-aged man out on a ledge of a tall building preparing to jump and end his life. Up rushes a trained police officer, a Southie, you know, a good Irish Catholic cop.

"Don't jump!" the cop reasons with him, "Think of your father."

The man replies, "Haven't got a father. Going to jump!"

"Think of your mother, for God's sake!"

"Haven't got a mother. Going to jump!"

So the cop continues with a list of relatives, trying desperately to connect on some level. But each time, he gets the same response: "Haven't got one. Going to jump!"

Finally, in desperation, the cop pleads, "Don't jump! Think of the Blessed Virgin!"

But the man replies, "Who's that?"

To which the cop responds, "Ahh, go ahead and jump then, you Protestant!"

Well, we could keep this up all day.

I'll conclude by reminding all of us of the importance of clear communication.

One congregation down South announces the sermon topics for the coming Sunday on it's website. Recently, that website said: "The sermon Sunday morning: 'Jesus Walks Across the Lake.' The sermon Sunday night: 'Searching for Jesus.'"

That website also had a reminder for the upcoming fundraiser: "Ladies, don't forget

the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.”

And then it continued! It said, “The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.”

Some other announcements there were as well, like this: “A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the parish hall. Music will follow.”

At another congregation, the Associate Minister was called upon to unveil the church's new annual pledge campaign slogan during the announcements one Sunday.

So he stood up and shared it with everyone: "I Upped My Pledge – Now Up Yours!"

Just one more.

An airplane was having engine problems mid-flight and the co-pilot came out to the passengers and asked if there was a minister or priest to say a prayer, but there was no response. Then he asked if there was a religious person on board who could at least say a prayer. Once again, no response. The co-pilot then asked if anyone knew anything religious!

A fellow raised his hand and said he grew up right next to a Catholic church in the city and that he used to listen to what he heard coming through the windows.

Maybe he could use some of that language?

The co-pilot was desperate, so he asked him to please go ahead.

The fellow then asked everyone to bow their heads and he began: “B19, N17, G5, A12, F6...”

My friends, complete joy and abundant life! This is what the first disciples of the Lord experienced. Sometimes it's good to let go of our analytical side and to just go with it. To just let the joy and life of the resurrected One wash over us, and to embrace all of it.

It's so good that you'll want to laugh out loud! Amen.

Oh, by the way: how many atheists does it take to change a light bulb?

What difference does it make! They refuse to see the light anyway!