

2018 01 04 – Easter Fools

Mark 16: 1-8

“They made their way out and fled from the tomb bewildered and trembling; but they said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.”

Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of the James and Salome had arrived at the tomb to find: the stone rolled away, Jesus' body missing and a youth in a white robe telling them that Jesus had risen and would meet them in Galilee. All they wanted to do was anoint Jesus' body with oil and instead they were faced with an empty tomb.

What kinds of thoughts would have been going through their minds? What must they have been thinking or feeling? What do you think? *(give time for a response... Was it true? What did he mean by risen? Was the body stolen? Where had it been taken? Was this a trick? Who was this young person in white? What were they going to tell the others? Would anyone believe them?)* They had so many unanswered questions. No wonder they were confused and afraid. If they told the others what they had seen and heard, would everyone think they were fools? They had every reason to be silent.

No one wants to be a fool. It's strange that in our culture we have a special day for making people look foolish. I'm sure many of you have stories of pranks you have pulled on April Fool's Day or tricks that have been played on you. Most of

you know that I have an identical twin sister and when Colette and I were in Grade One the older girls in our school convinced us to switch places in order to play an April Fool's joke on our teacher, Mr. Moffat. We sat at each other's desks and Mr. Moffat never said a word. To this day I don't know whether he figured out what we had done. All I remember is how uncomfortable I felt. Colette and I have very different writing, so I couldn't even work in her notebook without giving myself away. I was the one who felt like a fool. I couldn't wait until recess came and the joke would be over!

This year, of course, April Fool's Day also happens to fall on Easter Sunday. Recently, the Internet has been full of ideas for special Easter-themed pranks including ideas for making Easter Eggs with unexpected fillings. This all sounds like it could be a lot of fun, but what if, instead of thinking about how we could fool others, we consider what it means for us as Christians to be the fool. What if we were "fools for Christ" or more specifically "Easter fools?"

The resurrection itself can be thought of as a joke, a joke that God played on the devil or that Jesus played on death. We all know that Jesus died on the cross, but the story of the empty tomb reminds us that Jesus' spirit did not die. His spirit lived on in the hearts and minds of all who followed him and that same Christ spirit still lives in you and in me. So Jesus' death did not mean the end of his ministry, Jesus' death was instead the beginning of the Christian church. The Easter story is one that reminds us that new life comes from death. So does believing in the possibility of new life make me a fool? If it does, then count me in! I'm happy to be an Easter fool, to be a fool for Christ.

But it's not that easy. Being a fool for Christ requires more than just believing in the possibility of rebirth. Being a fool for Christ means being willing to change the way I live. It means being ready to look foolish to those around me. It means refusing to buy into all the norms of my society. It means having an allegiance to the gospel that is greater than my allegiance to any country or any culture.

One of the most famous "fools for Christ" was St. Francis of Assisi. This was a man who grew up in a wealthy family and who chose instead to live in poverty. St. Francis recognized that following Jesus meant that his relationships with people and with creation had to be more important than his pursuit of personal wealth and power. We know that his family and his friends mocked him for his choices. In a Franciscan blog, written two years ago, one of his followers wrote "If Francis had applied to religious life today, he'd never make it beyond the psychological exam!" Even now a man with his ideals would be deemed a fool!
<http://blog.franciscanmedia.org/becoming-a-fool-for-christ>

We are all faced with a lot of pressure to live within the norms of our society. It's not always easy to be different. When I was working for IBM I lived in a 700 square foot bungalow in downtown Toronto and drove a rather old Chevrolet Cavalier. Everyone that I worked with had shiny new vans or SUV's and lived in large houses in the new subdivisions north of the city. I chose to spend less so that I had more to give my church and more to put in my savings for seminary. One day, I arrived at work to find a brochure on my desk. In it were pictures and a description of the latest Cadillac Seville. I understood that it was meant as a joke, but I have to admit that it hurt, just a little.

Being a fool for Christ is not easy. Just ask Paul the first century apostle who spent his life starting new churches on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. In a letter to the early church in Corinth, Paul called himself and the other apostles “fools for Christ’s sake” (1 Cor 4:10). He went on to explain that these early followers of Jesus were sneered at, they were often hungry, thirsty, they wore rags and many were even homeless. Some of them ended up in prison or even worse. No one expects us to follow this extreme example, but there are times that we need to consider which way to go... the way of our society or the way of the gospel.

Those women outside the tomb had a difficult decision to make. They had just experienced a traumatic event. They were bewildered and trembling. They were so afraid that initially they said nothing to anyone. But we know that eventually they must have told their story. We know that eventually they risked the possibility of looking like fools. We know that because their story is an essential part of our Easter celebration.

It’s not easy being fools for Christ. It’s not easy being Easter Fools. But this is our calling. We are called to believe in the possibility of new life. We are called to work for God’s reign of peace and justice for all. We are called to choose the gospel even when it differs from the norms of our society. Christ is alive, may we all be fools for Christ.