

Easter Day  
John 20:1-18

## Fools for Christ\*

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Alleluia, Christ is risen! *The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!*

On this Easter morning, we gather to proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. We proclaim the good news that the forces of evil and death that led to Jesus' crucifixion were defeated by his resurrection. And we proclaim the good news that, ultimately, God's love is stronger than death. Death is never the last word.

As some of you may know, this has been quite a strange year in terms of the church calendar bumping up against the secular calendar. Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, coincided with Valentine's Day. There were a lot of great memes on social media about the romantic being mixed with the penitential. One of my favorites were photos of little candy hearts saying things like "U R Dust" or "Ash 2 Ash" or simply "Repent."

And today, of course, is both Easter Sunday and April Fool's Day. Another strange combination. One meme that's trending online says: "Easter and April Fool's [is] on the same day – tell the kids to search for the eggs you didn't hide." Now don't worry, we won't be doing that at *our* Easter egg hunt later today.

The last time there was the same mash-up of these holidays and holy days was back in 1945, some 73 years ago, during the rectorship of Father Randolph Ray!

I actually think that it's rather appropriate that Easter Sunday happens to fall on April Fool's Day this year. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that the resurrection was some kind of April Fool's joke or prank. Nor am I suggesting that one day we'll discover an ancient papyrus that will prove how Jesus never actually rose from the dead.

What I *am* saying is that, in this increasingly secular world, those of us who are followers of the Jesus Movement – as our Presiding Bishop calls it – are often thought of as fools by the broader society and culture.

According to our detractors, who else but a fool would proclaim that an itinerant rabbi, who was crucified as a religious and political rabble-rouser some two thousand years ago, was the Son of God and was raised from the dead? Who else but a fool would claim that death itself was defeated by this man's resurrection?

You know what? Our critics are right. We *are* fools. But not just any old fools. We are, as St. Paul puts it so wonderfully, "fools for Christ." As the second-century lawyer and

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theologian Tertullian responded proudly to his critics: *credo quia absurdum*. That is, “I believe because it is absurd.”

In fact, Jesus may have been the biggest fool of all. As St. John Chrysostom, the fourth-century archbishop of Constantinople, wrote:

Only a fool would attempt to change the world with a simple message of love and peace. So we can conclude that Jesus was a fool. [And] only fools would agree to follow such a man. . . . So we can conclude that all of us are fools. . . . So let [us] all happily admit that we are fools. Then we will happily commit ourselves to change the world.

In today’s gospel reading, we encounter two wonderful fools for Christ. First, we hear about John, the Beloved Disciple. John loved Jesus so much that he laid his head on Jesus’ chest at the last supper. And Jesus loved John so much that he entrusted his own mother to him. “Woman, here is your son,” Jesus said to his mother about John, as Jesus was dying on the cross.

When John heard that Jesus’ body was missing, he dropped everything and ran all the way to the tomb, even outrunning Peter. Although John didn’t see the risen Christ at the tomb, he did see the linen wrappings lying there. And he believed immediately. By most people’s standards, that was a totally absurd conclusion to draw. Surely Jesus’ body had been stolen by grave robbers! But somehow John *knew* that love had survived death. John was a fool for Christ.

We also hear about Mary Magdalene. Mary loved Jesus so much that she went by herself to the tomb, early in the morning on the third day – while it was still dark – in order to mourn for him. When Mary got there, she saw that the stone had been removed and Jesus’ body was missing. She was so upset that she could not stop crying.

In fact, she was so distraught that she didn’t even recognize Jesus when he appeared before her. She thought that he was the gardener! (As a side note, there is a fascinating tradition of artists who paint the resurrected Christ as a gardener. In fact, you can see this on the cover of this morning’s bulletin. If you look to the left of Jesus’ halo, you will see that he is carrying a gardening tool as he speaks to Mary.)

You could say that Mary overcome by grief. But when Jesus called her by her name, “Mariam,” she recognized him immediately. “Rabbouni!” she exclaimed. “Teacher!” There was no doubt in her mind that love had survived death, as absurd as that claim would have sounded to others. Mary, too, was a fool for Christ.

It’s been a tough year with so much turmoil going on in the world. I don’t know about you, but sometimes I can’t even turn on the news at night after work. As much as I love watching my favorite cable news shows, there is just so much troubling news all around us. Between the political turmoil in Washington, D.C., the violent conflict breaking out all over the world, the roller coaster performance of the stock markets, and the epidemic of gun violence, it can be hard to have faith in Easter.

But Easter teaches us that there is always hope. I’ve found hope in the high school students from Parkland, Florida, who, in a period of less than two months, have transformed the discourse in our country about gun control through the #NeverAgain movement, and in the incredible Marches for Our Lives that occurred last weekend.

I've found hope in the courageous women who have come forward through the #MeToo movement to speak out against sexual harassment and assault, and in the hundreds of women's marches that occurred around the world just this past January.

All of these people have, to paraphrase St. John Chrysostom, committed themselves to the foolish act of changing the world.

And whenever I think that *I'm* a fool for wanting better news, I've found hope in that early pre-dawn morning some two thousand years ago, when a foolish, grieving woman named Mary Magdalene came across an empty tomb and proclaimed to the apostles that she had seen the Lord. It is only because of this woman – the *apostola apostolorum*, the apostle to the apostles – that you and I are gathered here this morning.

As St. Paul writes so powerfully in his First Letter to the Corinthians, the message of the cross – and the resurrection – *is* foolishness. But it is the power of God for those who are being saved. God decided through the foolishness of the gospel to save those who believe. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom. And God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

So I wish you a Happy Easter. *And* a happy April Fool's Day. Yes, it *is* totally absurd to claim that death itself was conquered by an itinerant rabble-rouser from Palestine who was nailed to a cross some two thousand years ago and who rose from the dead. But for those of us who are fools for Christ, there is nothing truer – or more important – than this Easter proclamation. Love *is* stronger than death. And death is *never* the last word.

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