

“The Mirth of God” II

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UCC at The Villages, FL
April 1st, 2018, *Easter*
Luke 24:1-12, 13-33^a, 33^b-53,
John 20:11-18, 21:2-19

*When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter,
“Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”
He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”
He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”*

John 21:15 [RSV]

Let us pray... O God,
Engage us with your humor to challenge us in our arrogance,
to rouse us into awareness, to heal us when our hearts are broken,
and reassure us through the beauty of this world.

Amen

At the Sonrise Service, I posed these questions:

What have you been taught about who God is?

What do you think God is like?

Were you taught that God demands perfection

like a parochial school nun with a yardstick,

ready to mete out justice with a lightning strike smack?

Were you taught that God is against anything fun or different

or out of the ordinary?

It would be logical to assume God is like the kings and other powerful figures
that Jesus himself talked about in his parables, like...

locking out unprepared handmaidens

who didn't bring enough fuel for their lamps,

or binding up thoughtless servants who squander their talent,

or toss ne'er-do-wells into outer darkness to weep and gnash their teeth.

Is God like a king on a throne to judge the world

sorting out the good from the evil like sheep from goats?

So, how do you imagine what God is like?

Do you see God as almighty – and merciful, too?

Don't we *expect* God to be almighty?

Don't we prefer God to be more powerful than anything else that is out there?

Aren't we disappointed, though, when God doesn't seem to be around

at the time of tragedies that are personal and historic?

Where was God for the Jewish people during the Holocaust?

Where was God on 9/11? Where was God when *you* needed a miracle?

Well, we also have to ask where was God for Jesus?

When he was on the cross, crying out,

“Eli! Eli! Lama sabachthani?” “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?”

Let me invite you to consider another way of thinking about God –

that God has a sense of humor – for our sake and despite tragedy.

Willard, p.2

This is not to say that God plays jokes on people,

but that God uses humor to teach and to heal.

There are examples for this all throughout the Gospel stories of Jesus' resurrection.

In the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene went to grieve at Jesus' tomb
when she discovers that his body is gone!

She tells the disciples, but they don't find it either.

She speaks to the groundskeeper – though at first she doesn't recognize
that this is Jesus himself. and when he speaks, she recognizes him.

He says, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended..."

or did he say,

"Oy! Don't hold me so tight! I still must go up to Heaven!"

In the original ending of the Gospel of Mark,

the women who go to tomb meet an angel who tells them Jesus is alive,

but the story ends with the women being too afraid to tell anyone.

So... how is it that we do know their story?

Fear notwithstanding, they just had to tell someone – and everyone!

In the Gospel of Matthew, the women see an angel roll back the tombstone,
while the Roman guards are frozen in shock.

This angel tells the women that Jesus is risen, so they go on their way...

and just happen to bump into Jesus!

In the Gospel of Luke,

the women meet two angels at the empty tomb and they do tell the disciples,

but the men take it to be an idle women's tale and don't believe them.

Later that day, two of the male disciples were walking to a village

seven miles away from Jerusalem, when they meet a stranger –

who at first seems not to know about the events of Jesus' death

and the disappearance of his body.

So, they tell him what they saw and heard –

and he chides them for not believing what the *prophets* have-told-them.

Unbeknownst to them, the stranger is Jesus and

the 'prophets' he was talking about were the women who had been to the tomb!

Then, he speaks to them about how the Messiah must suffer,

and in this way, enter into his 'glory'.

They are so impressed by this discussion, that –

when they get to where they are going, they invite him to stay for dinner.

It is while they are reclined for dinner that they let this stranger do the blessing

and break bread – and that is when *they* recognize him!

They race back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples –

only to find him there!

Willard, p.3

They are all stunned – and like the women in the Gospel of Mark,
they afraid to say anything, because they don't want to be disappointed...

So, he asks... for something to eat!

They give him a piece of fish – which he eats to prove he really is alive
and present with them.

I imagine him picking a bone out of his teeth before continuing to speak
the words of encouragement, commissioning, and blessing
to bolster them on their mission.

However, it is the last chapter of John that provides the best example
for how Jesus used humor to the heal the grief and shame
that the Apostle Peter was feeling.

The disciples seem to have given up on the 'Save the World' business,
so they went back to their old way of life as fishermen.

They pull an all-nighter out on their boat, but catch nothing!

The next morning – Sunday morning, Jesus shows up on the shore of Galilee,
though the disciples don't know who this is.

He asks how they did fishing – they tell him, they caught nothing.

So, he tells them to put their nets on the right side of the boat –
which we presume to be the starboard-side.

Next thing you know, the nets are crammed with fish – 157 of them.

Some scholars say this represents all the known species of fish that region,
as a metaphor for the diversity of human-kind!

Now, the miraculous catch of fish happens at the end of the Gospel of John –
but at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke.

If we assume that Luke and John can be harmonized,

such that the miraculous catch of fish, happened twice,

then this second event should have been a reminder for the disciples.

It was John who makes the connection, when he says,

“It's the Lord!”

It's at this point that Peter finally catches on,

but then he does something really odd...

He had taken his clothes off for his work on the boat,

and when he hears Jesus is waiting on the beach, he puts his clothes back on –
but then he jumps into the water!

I think he acted out of reflex – and was trying to get away!

Yet the joke was on him, because there was no place to go –
but to swim in to shore...

The disciples row ashore and they are joined by Peter to find

Jesus sitting by a fire with fish cooking, and nobody asks who this. They know.

Jesus asks them to bring some of the fish they had just caught –

and it is *Peter* who goes back on the boat to bring the fish ashore...

Willard, p.4

He should've stayed in the boat!

And he should not have panicked when Jesus was arrested.

He should've stayed 'in the boat' of faith!

After breakfast, Jesus seems to casually ask Peter if he loves him.

"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."

He said to him, "Feed my lambs." [John 21:15 (RSV)]

When Jesus said, 'do you love me more than these?'

He was talking about the 'fish' or "fishing" or even the other disciples

which goes back to Jesus' call to make Peter and the others,
real fishermen, as in 'fishers of men' and of women, too.

Now, he calling Peter the fisherman into a new career field –

to become the shepherd for Jesus' flock of disciples and other followers.

Three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves him,

Peter answers that he does love Jesus, but the word he uses for 'love'

in Greek is understood in this way:

"You know that I am your friend."

Jesus doesn't forgive him – he doesn't *say* to Peter, 'I forgive you',

but it is obvious that he did forgive him, when he tells Peter,

'Feed my sheep.' 'Take care of my lambs.' 'Feed my lambs.'

as if to say, "I trust you. You can do this. Get busy!"

The promise to the disciples and to us all, was that

Christ would suffer and die on a cross – and on the third day, rise.

The responsibility that he gave to them and to us,

was that repentance and forgiveness should be preached in his name,

starting with Jerusalem and then, going out into the world.

No more blood sacrifice. No more unjust laws of unattainable perfection.

We are to follow Jesus Christ's example of joyful commitment despite the cost.

Christ gave us baptism into God's family

marking us like a tattoo that leaves no scar...

Christ gave us communion as a sacrifice that doesn't require bloodshed,

but reminds us that *his* blood was shed...

Christ gave us commandments that make sense: to live lives of love.

So, whoever you are, and wherever you are on life's journey to God,

you/we are welcome to join Jesus Christ in this dance of life,

to be like him: joyful & fearless, even funny & defiant

for the sake of justice & peace 'on Earth as it is in Heaven'...

Willard, p.5

From the song, "Lord of the Dance",

we have a fanciful image of Jesus as if he was saying:

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,

And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,

And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth:

At Bethlehem I had my birth.

And though it is clear that,

It's hard to dance with the world on your back

Jesus the Lord of the Dance, proclaims...

They cut me down and I leapt up high;

I am the life that'll never, never die.

I'll live in you if you'll live in me:

I am the Lord of the dance, said he.

So...

Dance, then, wherever you may be,

I am the Lord of the dance, said he,

And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,

And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.

Amen