

## Easter Day, 1 April 2018

Isa 25:6-9; Easter Anthems; Acts 10:34-43; Mark 16:1-8

### *April Fools?*

Happy Easter! Welcome to this Eucharistic feast, in which we taste something of that inclusive banquet of which Isaiah speaks in our first reading, and which extends to our post-worship feasting down in the Old Vicarage and courtyard, where you will also be most welcome. I can't promise well-matured wine, but there will be enough and to spare, and we hope you can stay and partake in that food and fellowship.

The coincidence of Easter Day and April Fools' Day is an interesting one, to say the least. All Fools' Day, as it's also known, is a day *par excellence* for 'fake news'. It is said to have its origins with the fool's errand of the dove sent out from the ark by Noah before the water had abated – on April 1<sup>st</sup> apparently, although I don't recall reading that in Genesis chapter 8!

In Melbourne it also marks the early days of the International Comedy Festival, during which one year the ABC's *Triple J* breakfast radio ran a competition called 'Jesus, You've Got Talent'. The idea was that contestants would come to Fed Square dressed up as Jesus (you can just imagine the array of badly-arranged bedsheets, old sandals, and improvised beards on display), and then perform their favourite party piece: juggling cats, yodelling the national anthem, or whatever.

Public reactions on that Easter weekend confirmed the view of some that – even in the middle of a comedy festival – Christians have no sense of humour.

Had the resurrection taken place at the corner of Swanston and Flinders Streets that particular April morning, and a bleary-eyed Jesus was told by an over-zealous radio producer to fill out an entry form – and, by the way, great costume! – while waiting for his turn behind Jesus #7 over there with the ukulele, I wonder what he would have listed as his talent? After all, as father Abraham says in the parable: if people won't take notice of Moses and the prophets nor will they be impressed even if someone should rise from the dead. (Lk 16:31)

The demand for signs was, of course, something Jesus knew well: a gospel theme nicely parodied by Herod's song in *Jesus Christ Superstar*: 'Prove to me that you're no fool, walk across my swimming pool.'

And in recent days we've been reminded of the fickle reception the works Jesus did perform received at the hands of various sets of judges, works such as: pronouncing forgiveness; finding a place at table for the socially and thus economically marginalised; challenging oppressive or self-serving readings of life-giving traditions; naming injustice; enabling the broken to find healing and wholeness. Each an expression of his one great talent, namely extending divine hospitality.

During this Holy Week we have heard St Paul speaking of the cross as folly: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks. How much more so this morning's account of an empty tomb, which in Luke's gospel is described as an 'idle tale' (Luke 24:11), as 'fake news'? For the women in Mark's gospel the message that the Crucified One has risen is so unthinkable as to be terrifying, and for fear more of its truth perhaps than its falsity, they flee in silence.

The Apostle Paul goes on in that letter to the early church in Corinth to call himself a ‘fool for the sake of Christ’ (1 Cor 4.10): a fool because he subjected the prevailing rationalities of his Stoic and pharisaic worldview to the counter-intuitive rationality of the cross: standing under it in order to understand the paradoxical shape of divine wisdom. No wonder he is declared mad by Judean king Agrippa (26.24) and mocked in the great philosophical centre of Athens (17.32).

According to Paul, that in which we put our hope today is what to all the world looks like nonsense, leaving us the most pitiable of all people, if in fact Christ be not raised (1 Cor 15:19). Yet Paul’s experience (paralleled by Peter’s to some extent in our second reading from Acts), Paul’s experience both from his Jewish pedigree and his calling to serve the Gospel among Gentiles – is that the God of Israel, the One Jesus called Father, has ever been in the business of bringing light out of darkness, and life out of death.

In his letter to the Romans (4:17) he describes God as one who makes the dead live and calls into being that which is not, with particular reference to Abraham, evoking a raft of stories of barren women bearing children: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel.

Sarah thinks it’s laughable when she is told by divine guests that she will bear a son – ‘after I have grown old and my husband has grown old, shall I have pleasure?’ Surely this is a joke – an April Fool’s gag, as she checks the calendar. And, as the story goes God, at least, does have a sense of humour, with the son duly born to Sarah named Isaac, meaning laughter.

A few chapters earlier in Genesis, that dove which had come back empty-handed from its first reconnaissance mission did return with a leaf from its second; and on the third outing it flew away to new life beyond the tomb-like and womb-like ark.

They’ll say you’re joking, Mary, when at length you stop running, draw breath, and find your voice. But if you’d told us that you’d found him there, still, and cold, and lifeless, this eternal Word of Abraham’s God, who calls into being that which is not – if you’d told us that, then we might have laughed.

With you, we return to Galilee, to where it all begins: and we search the scriptures, receiving your story – and ours – again and afresh; making sense of it in light of our experience, as you did – as people of faith have been doing ever since Abraham: shaping their lives with the story; shaping the story with their lives.

And, sure enough, we will meet him in those pages, and in each other, and at this and every table where divine hospitality is shared.

So too, on this glorious Easter morning, we return with his body the Church to the starting point of the font, to the promises made at our baptism; and we renew there our calling to holy folly: to imitate and proclaim the God-child wiser than the Magi; the boy in the Temple more learned than the sages; the foolishness of the cross as the wisdom and power of God; and the rumour of the empty tomb as creation’s first and deepest rationality.<sup>1</sup>

Yes, on this All Fools Day we rejoice to be fools for Christ: April fools for him who – ever the Crucified One – is risen.

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<sup>1</sup> See John Saward, *Perfect Fools*.