



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

*Why do you look for the living
among the dead?*

Luke 24.1–12

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APRIL FOOLS!

Today is April Fool's Day, and Easter might be the greatest April Fool's Day surprise of all time. The Roman Empire and religious officials thought they could mock and kill Jesus, and their little Jesus problem would go away. The joke was clearly on them. The Jesus Movement has lasted far longer than the Roman Empire ever did.

The people also got a big surprise. Those expecting Jesus to swoop in and restore Israel like the Maccabees had a couple hundred years earlier when they ousted a different invading army were sorely disappointed. Jesus came in, disrupted the political and religious establishments and then he was executed. Of course that wasn't the end of the story...

Easter just might be the best April Fools surprise of all time. But of course April Fools Day wasn't around in Jesus' time.

THE ORIGINS OF APRIL FOOLS DAY

There are a bunch of theories out there about when and why April Fools Day started, but the one that seems most plausible to me is in this: 1500s the Western world went from the Julian calendar—which marked the beginning of the year as late March—to the Gregorian Calendar. You would think that any fool would know that the Gregorian calendar would be the one to use. That's what most everyone did switching over. But, believe it or not, there were still some who could not and would not let go of the old calendar. So when they were celebrating the New Year in April they were ridiculed as "April Fools."

Then and now it's easy to laugh at these people. *But really, who can blame them? We all have a hard time wrapping our heads around new realities. Which is of course, also part of the Easter Story. Tombs don't empty themselves. People don't just come alive again after being dead. The power of love doesn't defeat the power of sword... Does it!?*

2 LUKE 24.1–12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

The scripture tells the story of people trying to wrap their heads around a new reality. The women enter the tomb and are confused. The disciples hear the news and they can't accept it. **They are stuck on Saturday.**

I say "stuck on Saturday" because this is how it went. Jesus is crucified on Friday, but can't be properly buried because the Sabbath begins at sundown. And so Jesus' loved ones have to wait all day Saturday. What terrible day that must have been. They have to sit with the trauma of his execution, and the grief of losing their Lord, and helplessness of knowing his body is not properly prepared. What an awful Saturday for those who love him.

Finally, Sunday morning comes and Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James among other

women—the most faithful of Jesus’ followers—go to the tomb to prepare his body with ointments and spices.

But then a strange thing happens. They see that the stone was rolled away from the tomb. They look in and do not see a body. Then suddenly two men in dazzling white clothes appear and ask, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” and then go on to remind them of what Jesus had said. The women’s minds must have been blown, but we get the impression that in that moment (SNAP!) they went from **stuck in Saturday’s pain to alive on SUNDAY full of expectation!**

Naturally they went to tell the disciples (without women preachers we’d have no knowledge of the resurrection), and predictably the disciples don’t understand. They can’t wrap their heads around this new reality. **Still stuck on Saturday.**

And that’s often where we get stuck too. *We have a hard time wrapping our heads around new realities.* We don’t look for life because we expect to see death. Bodies don’t rise. Nonviolence doesn’t win. Hope is just a feeling. It seems more realistic, it’s safer not to get our expectations up with these optimistic fairy tales. It’s easier to sit on Saturday, right?!

But we are a Sunday people. We *can* wrap our heads around new realities. And I’m not talking about forced belief in bodily resurrection here. I’m talking about the belief that Jesus way of love is better than the world’s way of death. I’m talking about the belief that the moral arc of the universe does indeed bend towards justice and that we are part of that. I’m talking about the belief that hope is real and means something.

4 It's been a hard, fearful year. The globe feels a little more dangerous with new technological threats popping up. It would be really easy for us to get stuck on Saturday. Our country seems meaner. White nationalism and hate groups have rebounded. Our President, no matter what you think of him as a person or President was endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan. It would be really easy for us to get stuck on Saturday. The opioid epidemic is claiming lives in more ways than one. It would be really easy for us to get stuck on Saturday. **But we are Sunday People.**

REGIFTING

We are Sunday people, and you don't have to look far to find the proof of God at work here. You may recall that just a few months ago we pastors and church board, inspired by the giving that we see in this faith community, wanted to share the joy that we get when we pass along the generosity as representatives of the church. We gave an envelope to everybody who came to worship on the morning of Christmas Eve. In those envelopes was a 20-dollar bill and a card. On that card we asked you to write down what you did with the money and bring the cards back. We ended up handing out more than 250 envelopes. **Here's the proof that we are Sunday People:**

There is a young woman with a small child, who I believe is staying at the homeless shelter. They come into the Library almost everyday and stay for the day. They are kind, respectful and quiet. I gave her the money with an explanation of our church's sermon series on regifting. She was very moved.

Belinda Good Scholarship Fund

I anonymously gave my \$20 to a recent widow who was having financial difficulties even before her husband's death.

This money went to the family of an 8-year old boy. His most common prayer request at school is for his family to get more money to pay the bills.

Donation to Samara Food Fund.

Sent it to a friend that has multiple medical issues and is trying to live on Social Security...Then she took \$10 and purchased 10-99 cent loaves of bread for her local food bank.

It was used to help pay the fees to breed the heifer bought by Elizabethtown CoB at the DRA. She is being taken back to the sale this year and being bred will increase her value at the sale.

I sent my \$20, with an additional \$500, to Heifer Project.

I donated to the Malala Fund. It helps girls who don't have an education. Inspired by Malala Yousafzai, this gift can give girls a promising future.

Bought lunch for a stranger and gave to a dog charity.

Gave to a Foster Mother in her 70s in Panama City, Florida.

We both matched the gift you gave us and are returning a total of \$80 to the Etown CoB as an expression of our humble gratitude for the profound help, inspiration, guidance and support the church has given our family over the decades, and in the hope that others may also be served in body, mind and spirit, in the future.

40 dollars was changed into Euros...and was gratefully accepted by someone who had previously not been willing to accept our offers of financial assistance.

Exiting a Turkey Hill right after church on Sunday, we spotted a young father with a young son. I handed the envelope to him. He said, "What's this?" I said, "You'll see" and walked on. What an experience, I teared up a bit with emotion. Thanks to all!

6 We have our \$20 toward basic hygiene supplies to a young man released from a Mental Health Hospital in York with no medication for his mental health. MHALC paid for his meds to enable him to be admitted to Water Street Mission. Realizing he may have missed dinner to save time, a meal at McDonald's was bought, too.

When I was 14, I was in a group home before being placed in foster care. We were given Christmas gifts from a local church. I decided to give a Christmas gift, a necklace that says, "She believed she could-so she did!" to a Lancaster County teen girl in foster care through Lancaster County Children and Youth ~Deb Santiago

Gave to a young family who lost everything in their apartment due to a fire.

Mini-thon Donation-helping stop childhood cancer.

I get moved reading these. They are expressions of the creativity, the joy, the generosity. Rooted in Jesus, the life-giving hope that is embodied in these acts is proof that we will not get stuck on Saturday. We are Sunday people.

AND SO HERE'S WHAT I'M ASKING OF YOU TODAY.

Don't get your hopes up for another \$20. Today, I'm asking you to make a decision to keep living as Sunday People.

Your part is easy here WE ARE SUNDAY PEOPLE:

- When it is Saturday and it seems like the forces of death are winning the day, we will have the courage and love to go to the tomb, and we will wrap our minds around a new reality because...WE ARE SUNDAY PEOPLE!
- When hatred creeps in and we want an eye for an eye, instead we love our enemies and win them to the Way because...WE ARE SUNDAY PEOPLE!

- When life feels too much when illness, loneliness, addiction takes over and we want to give in to desperation, we will find strength in our sisters and brothers because...WE ARE SUNDAY PEOPLE!
- When the road for justice is long and winding, we will act on the faith that in the end God wins, because... WE ARE SUNDAY PEOPLE!
- We will live in the love and joy of Jesus because...WE ARE SUNDAY PEOPLE!

BENEDICTION

Being Sunday people makes a difference. For you. For the world.

The gift of Jesus is regifted again and again.

