

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the risen Lord, Jesus Christ... Amen.

He is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia! What a great morning for a couple of Holy Humor stories... Did you hear the little boy praying in church as the congregation said the Lord's Prayer? One young boy said, "Our Father, Who does art in heaven, Harold is His name..." And from another, "And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets." Speaking of children's prayers... A little boy was overheard praying: "Lord, if you can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it. I'm having a real good time like I am."

One Sunday as the children were getting ready to return to the Sanctuary after Children's Church, the Sunday School teacher asked the children why it was so important to be quiet as they returned to their parents. One little girl who was very observant replied, "Because so many people are sleeping..."

While on a family vacation at the beach a little boy found a dead seagull on the shore. He asked his father what happened. The father said the seagull had died and gone to heaven. The little boy looked at his dad with a puzzled look on his face and asked, "Did God throw him back?"

A young mother wanted to teach her two sons, ages 3 and 5, a moral lesson about not being greedy or always needing to be first. As she was making their

favorite breakfast, blueberry pancakes, she saw her opportunity. As the boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake their mother said, “If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, ‘Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait’.” At this the older boy turned to his younger brother and said, “you be Jesus!...”

Here's one that might hit a little close to home... A very zealous soul-winning young preacher recently came upon a farmer working in his field. Being concerned about the farmer's soul the preacher asked the man, “Are you laboring in the vineyard of the Lord my good man?” Not even looking at the preacher and continuing his work the farmer replied, “Naw, these are soybeans.” “You don't understand,” said the preacher. “What I mean is, are you a Christian?” With the same amount of interest as his previous answer the farmer said, “Nope my name is Jones. You must be lookin for Jim Christian. He lives a mile south of here.” The young determined preacher tried again asking the farmer, “Are you lost?” “Naw! I've lived here all my life,” answered the farmer. “Are you prepared for the resurrection?” the frustrated preacher asked. This caught the farmer's attention and he asked, “When's it gonna be?” Thinking he had accomplished something the young preacher replied, “It could be today, tomorrow, or the next day.” Taking a handkerchief from his back pocket and wiping his brow, the farmer remarked,

“Well, don't mention it to my wife. She don't get out much and she'll wanna go all three days.” ...

Finally, I hope your table grace for your Easter family dinner goes a little smoother than this... At a recent family holiday dinner the youngest child, a girl of just 6 years old was asked to say grace. The girl giggled and finally said she didn't know what to say. Her father said to just pray what she has heard her mommy pray... The daughter bowed her head and said: "Dear Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?" ...

I little Holy Humor goes a long way... Aren't you all glad I only do stand up comedy once a year? While we say the resurrection of Jesus was God's joke on the devil, the resurrection is no laughing matter. So, the best news anyone could ever hear is this: the tomb is empty, and Jesus lives! These facts changed the world, and they continue to change our world still today... The events of that first Easter morning over 2,000 years ago are, for some, nothing more than ancient history. Others believe it's no more than a myth or legend... For billions of people, though, the resurrection and the empty tomb are more than history, or even living history. The empty tomb and the promise of the resurrection are a powerful force in our lives today, because Jesus, who was crucified, rose from the dead and now lives.

As the sun peeked over the horizon on that first Easter morning, Mary was surprised and confused. She had come to the tomb early in the morning, before sunrise because she loved Jesus and wanted to spend time honoring him possibly in prayer or possibly to finish the burial measures for Jesus, because she and the other women were unable to complete their task before the beginning of the Sabbath. She expected to only encounter death. Instead, she discovered that the entrance to the tomb was open. She was so confused... She ran to where the disciples were staying and told them the tomb was empty and perhaps someone had stolen Jesus' body. Peter and another disciple ran to the tomb. They entered the tomb and saw the burial clothes lying on the shelf where Jesus' body had been laid. The disciples were also now confused. They didn't know what to make of the empty tomb, because they hadn't connected the dots and understood the Scripture that Jesus must raise from the dead.

Two thousand years may separate us from Mary and the disciples, but we aren't so different from them. There are so many times when we're confused. The news seems to be getting more fake all the time. Our leaders tell us to follow the science even while they go maskless in public and kiss one another on the cheek in public while telling us that we have to stay in masks and avoid close contact... We do not know what we should do, or what needs to be done to survive the economic upheaval that we are in. Between run-away inflation and shortages of items at our

stores, we don't know what the future holds. So, we don't really know what goals to set, or what plans to make. Confusion brings fear and stress and frustration...

In the midst of our confusion, we discover the empty tomb. We know what happened 2,000 years ago. We know Jesus conquered death, and that he now lives. We might not understand these times, but we do know some things—Jesus lives and God is up to something surprising. Jesus is the first fruit of the resurrection and we are promised that because Jesus lives, we will also conquer death and the grave...

The disciples left and Mary stood outside the tomb weeping. She was overcome with grief. Her master and friend had died. Not only that, but his body had been taken. Relationships had been cut and hopes dashed. I don't think there's a person here who doesn't know what grief is like. We have lost friends and family members, and a hole has been left in our lives. Even more, during these difficult times there's plenty of things to grieve—the lost of a job or lowered income due to the higher cost of, well, everything... Maybe it's the threat of losing your home, or strained or severed relationships, or the loss of self-esteem, independence, and security as we grow older... In the middle of her grief, Mary discovers that Jesus is alive. Her grieving is quickly turned into celebration and dancing. We meet a living Jesus in the middle of our grieving, loss and confusion too... When we do, the situation changes. There is still loss and difficult times,

but along with it comes the hope and the promise of new life. Death in its many forms has been conquered. A living Jesus walks with us through all of life. We, like Mary, are called to share what we have seen, heard, and experienced. The tomb is empty! Jesus lives and he is alive today! Our confused and grieving world needs to hear this good news. Among all the fake news this is true and it is good news for us and for the world. And that's no joking matter!

Before I end this sermon, one more thing... Do you know why Jesus appeared to the women like Mary first? He wanted to make sure the news spread quickly....

May the empty tomb draw you in to see like Mary and Peter and the other disciple that Jesus is not there. May we be as quick to spread the good news of the resurrection as those first disciples. He is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!
Thanks be to God! Amen!