

Fools for Christ
Mark 16:1-8
Elizabeth M. Deibert

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Why are you here? What kind of person comes to sit in a hard chair and listen to the same person read from an ancient text and speak for 20 minutes every week? (Ha! Well, some of you don't actually come every week, do you?) But you regulars -- what kind of April fools are you?

Some historians speculate that April Fools' Day dates to the ancient Rome where a day in spring was set aside for frivolity. Others say it dates to 1582 when France switched from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian, as called for by the Council of Trent. Those who missed it were teased for not being aware. Around 1700 in England, we have record of pranksters beginning to play tricks on what became known as April Fools' Day. You will find three prankster announcements in your bulletin, should you decide to read it....But don't read it now, for goodness sake. I am trying to preach!

Since 1900, Easter has fallen on April Fools' Day only four times - 1923, 1934, 1945 and 1956. It won't happen again until 2029. But long before there was April Fools' Day, The Apostle Paul said to the Christians in Corinth, "Christ did not send me to proclaim the mystery of gospel with eloquent words of wisdom for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God." He also said, "If Christ has not been raised, our proclamation is in vain and all who have died have truly perished and we of all people are to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised..." And he goes on to speculate that people will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? And Paul calls says, "Fool – what you sow not come to life unless it dies." What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. Sown in weakness, raised in power.

Now I cannot prove to you that what Paul says is true. Nor can I prove to you that what the Gospels say about Christ being raised from the dead is true. I cannot prove it as a scientist proves her theory. But I can attest to the power of the dying seed and the proclaimed Gospel to bring new life. I can tell you all I've

seen of the love of Jesus Christ and how it changes lives. I can say that being a witness to the resurrection week in and week out but especially at the time of a death is the most meaningful difficult thing I ever do. Kind of like having a child or devoting yourself to teaching or caregiving or deciding to love someone forever – most meaningful and difficult thing you ever do. But I keep working at this foolish job – proclaiming God’s truth, no matter how crazy the rational world might think we are. We can testify to our experience of what is true, even when we cannot prove anything. I am absolutely sure that this Gospel brings hope and peace and gives purpose to our lives. Only those who find a way to accept death, really get on with living. But before I preach too long, we must get to the story of the day – Jesus birth.... (Gotcha!) No, actually the resurrection of Jesus – a rebirth from the tomb, which is the promise of our new life as well.

Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. (NRS)

Mark’s Gospel entire Gospel ends with fear? That’s foolish. They fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had grabbed their frontal cortex, their amygdala, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. It is women who announce this important truth in the first century – that’s foolish! The women begin with an act of dutiful love, anointing Jesus’ body, which they presume to be dead.

On approach they consider the weight of the stone – that’s foolish. Wouldn’t you think they considered the stone earlier? And then they are shocked to see the stone had been moved. They move from shock to alarm when they see in place where they expected Jesus’ body, a young man in a white robe, who tells them not to be afraid. He says, “You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, but he has been raised. Look – he is not here. That’s where he was laid.” The man in white urges them to go and tell the disciples and especially Peter that Jesus is coming to Galilee to meet them. “You will see him, just as he told you.” And they calmed down, sang some Hallelujahs and sat down to eat some jelly beans and chocolate, and said, “Whew, we are so relieve to know he’s not dead.” Well, not exactly.

No, they still had to go through the emotions of death – just as we do. Even when we KNOW that death doesn’t get the last word, we still mourn. We experience anxiety. It took the women and the disciples several appearances over a forty day period to get on board with the foolish and unbelievable news. It often takes us a couple of years to adjust to such a loss.

Did they hear the young man? Yes, but they could not appropriate his message. And what does it mean for us to hear and embrace the voices of the young in our world today? Might we move to new life and away from cynicism if we did. Are we able to hear the truth from unexpected places or does it just sound like foolishness to us? Jesus being raised seemed foolishness to the women.

They watched him die. They knew how good he was and they saw him take everything that could be done to him – his friends betrayed, fell asleep on his at his worst hour, and denied even knowing him, after big promises of loyalty. He was misunderstood, insulted, mocked, tortured, and killed without a fair trial. All the evil of the world was thrust upon him, and he took it. Christ took it, so he could by love overcome it. It sounds so foolish, doesn’t it? Why does one with all the power in the world, relinquish it? He knew power could be made perfect in weakness but we said, “That’s crazy, that makes no sense.”

Foolishness – that we would engage a mission in Haiti. Why do we think we can make a difference in such an impoverished country? Foolishness back in 2005 to start a new church in Lakewood Ranch with a dozen people.

Foolishness to build a sanctuary when you only have 100 people pledging to donate to that sanctuary. Foolishness to give to the One Great Hour of Sharing to try to help the Puerto Ricans after the Hurricane and to support refugee families and those seeking self-development around the world. Foolishness to pray for the healing of a 15 year old girl with 95% of her body burned. Foolishness to try to be a congregation that speaks peace to conflict, that embraces differences and believes we are one in Christ. Foolishness to love your enemies and pray for those who curse you. Foolishness to have open doors and hearts.

But this is the most foolish thing in the world – that God became a weak little baby and grew up and lived in perfect love, with free from sin, but to show us love, took on all our sin might do to him. He took everything we could throw at him, and it quite literally killed him. Yet God’s love can never be buried and gone. God’s love always wins, not by force but by gift. Free gift of forgiveness and peace offered to the world. Taking on the agony of all the evil of all of us, the worst in each of us. Nobody does that! And further, nobody has ever seen this – a person raised from the dead. But this is our story, our foolish story, that we by faith trust to be the truth, ultimate kind of truth.

It may sound foolish, but we know that rocks will move, hearts will change, doors will open. Christ is risen. *Let none fear death for the death of the Savior has set us free. He has destroyed death by undergoing death. He has ruined hell by descending into hell. The bitterness of hell could not stand up against Christ’s goodness. Hell received Christ’s body and encountered God. It received earth and encountered heaven. O death, where is your sting? O hell, where is your victory?* (St John Chrysostom of the 4th Century) So we will sing Hallelujah to the world even if they see us as fools. For the last shall be first, the meek will inherit the earth, and one day there will be no more tears or pain or suffering, because we have a God foolish enough to love us into life by dying our death. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed.** All the darkness of hell has been stripped of its power to frighten us. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed.** Don’t be afraid! Despite the skepticism of the world, be fools for Christ, with open doors and hearts, open for opportunity, for grace. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed.** Alleluia! Amen.