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Scarborough United Church  
Calgary, AB  
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Read: John 2: 19-31

## The Joy of Doubt

I don't know why, but I thought of God when I heard this story:

A young man was walking through a supermarket to pick up a few things when he noticed an old lady following him around. Thinking nothing of it, he ignored her and continued on. Finally he went to the checkout line, but she got in front of him. "Pardon me," she said, "I'm sorry if my staring at you has made you feel uncomfortable. It's just that you look just like my son, who just died recently." "I'm very sorry," replied the young man, "Is there anything I can do for you?" "Yes," she said, "As I'm leaving, can you say 'Good-bye mother!' it would make me feel much better." "Sure," answered the young man. As the old woman was leaving, he called out, "Good-bye mother!" and felt quite good about himself that he did a good deed and made someone feel happy. As she stepped up to the checkout counter, he saw that his total was \$127.50. "How can that be?" he asked, "I only purchased a few things!" The clerk looked him dead in the eye and said, "Your mother said that you would pay for her."

If you don't believe that story is true, don't worry about it. You weren't there and today is the day, as you heard in the Scripture reading, we honour those who doubt. A new tradition is being developed around this day from what I can gather. Over the last 20 years a number of churches have been marking the first Sunday after Easter as Holy Hilarity or Holy Humour Sunday! Believe it or not - and you may believe it or not - in the Orthodox tradition, which dates back to the first century, on the Monday following Easter priests gather and tell each other jokes a convivial way of capturing and continuing the joy of the Resurrection that we celebrate during this Easter season.

And so today is a day we can shake our heads in disbelief at the unbelievable God we worship; a God who laughs at our feeble attempts to kill life. A God who laughs at the way we quake in our boots at the thought of death. A God who cracks up at those who think that power and wealth have brought them anything but misery. A God whose cosmic belly laugh lifts Jesus right out of the grave and whose chuckles drive the quivering, terrified disciples out of a locked-up room and into the streets to bring the church into being. A God who laughs in delight at the very thought that after 2000 years people still think the church is dead and that they have much more important stuff to do.

(13 October 2008, Germany) "Smoking kills... if you try hard enough." A 42-year-old man was badly injured by his arm at a scene one morning. The previous night he had inflated the punctured mattress with a tire repair spray which, like all solvent-based aerosols, is flammable. Furthermore, he did this while keeping the window slightly closed in his loft apartment. The next morning, this airhead lit a smoke before he opened the valve to deflate the mattress. The resulting explosion wrecked most of the furnishings, part of the roof, and blew a window from the wall. The damage was so severe that a structural engineer condemned the flat. Narrowly missing a "full-blown" Darwin Award, our hero was taken to a Burn Care Unit, and managed to survive this incident.

Part of the reason humor works on us is because the jokes and funny stories we tell are at least somewhat believable while at the same time are not believable at all. They engender belief and doubt at the same time. Some start off ridiculous and end up true, others seem true until you hear the punch line and realize you have been hornsogged.

Doubt can lead to laughter and delight. Doubt can also lead to disbelief. That is the joy of it.

So, if you have a hard time believing the stories told today, can you imagine the trouble Jesus's disciples had believing that he was raised from the dead just because his tomb was empty. No one had ever done that before. Sure, there had been talk of such things for years, centuries even, but it had never happened. And if it had, then no one had ever come back to tell about it. Is it any wonder they were gathered in fear? Fear for their lives, not from Jesus or God, but from the Jewish leaders who were out to get them. The authorities either wanted to get rid of Jesus's followers or find out where they had hid the body, then get rid of them.

They were also afraid because their whole world had come crashing down around them with Jesus's arrest, trial and execution. What could they believe anymore? Where would they go? What would they do?

Was it on the breath of a cosmic chortle that Jesus appeared among them? "Shalom aleichem," he said, "Peace be with you." Peace indeed! Peace was needed to set their fears at rest. Peace was needed to relieve them of their guilt. They had abandoned Jesus, failed to stand with him in death as they had in life. Failed to do anything but cower in fear. Would we do any different? Peace, indeed. And he gave them the power to love others in spite of their actions and attitudes, the power to forgive.

But what about Thomas, poor old Doubting Thomas, the disciple with the bum rap. The patron saint of everyone who skipped church only to hear what a great service they missed! I say that because Thomas was no more doubting than the others who had to see Jesus before they believed. That is all Thomas wanted. To see and touch and be sure. And that is the opportunity he was given. Jesus came and invited him to touch his wounds.

And look at what happened! Because of his expressed doubt or disbelief, Thomas is granted an encounter with the risen Christ. It is precisely when we are honest about our doubt and have our minds, our ears, are open, that we may come face to face with ultimate truth.

A doubting Thomas encounters a wounded Christ and a faith is born. When our doubts encounter the wounds of Christ, we will know God. When your doubts touch my wounds, and my doubts touch your wounds, we become real, a church is born, new life begins.

And then God says, "I don't believe it! I was afraid it would never happen."

"How blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe!"

poem /prayer for Holy Hum or's unday

dour-faced  
in the presence  
of stunning sunsets

stricken with  
chronic severity  
while surrounded  
by gurgling babies

frozen-souled  
when touched

by the warmth  
of grace;

if we are made  
in your image,  
it's nowonder  
people think of you  
as a grouchy old geezer,  
God of Job.

so, breathe on us. . .

fill our souls with:  
laughter which chases away  
long faces  
chuckles which wipe  
frowns off our brows  
great guffaws  
which shatter  
frozen hearts

fill us  
Breath of sidesplitting shrieks  
so we can celebrate  
the last laugh  
on death.

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