

The Resurrection of Our Lord, Easter Day 2018, April 1, 2018, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Lancaster, PA, Kurt S. Strause

Last Easter our children, grown children mind you, and our daughter's future son in law, decided to play an Easter prank on us. They roamed the house and hid about a hundred colorful plastic Easter eggs throughout the house. We started finding the eggs almost right away, hidden in the usual, easily discovered places; sock drawers, on bookshelves, in the basement in my toolbox. Within a week or two we found about half of them. Every now and then one will turn up in an unlikely place, or someplace we don't often go to. Early this year, when I got out my nice winter coat for the first time I put my hand in the pocket and came up a green egg. A few weeks ago, rumaging around in a little used drawer of stuff, there was another Easter egg. Lois and I think we're just about caught up.

Today, of course, is also April Fool's Day. The first time Easter and this day given over to pranks and mirth coincide since 1956. It won't happen again until 2029, so if you are inclined to play an Easter prank, say take the foil off some of those small chocolate easter eggs and wrap grapes up in them and put them in a bowl for your guests, now is the time to do it. Humor and Easter seem naturally to go hand in hand, Easter after all being the best joke God could play on all those who thought they had gotten rid of Jesus once and for all. A good joke takes what you already know, kind of suspect might happen, and then turns it around in an unexpected way.

Like the story of the Sunday School teacher with a class of young children teaching them about Easter. She asked her class, "does anyone know what Jesus did on that first Easter?" The class looked at her with puzzled faces, shaking their heads. Then she said, "I'll give you a hint. It begins with an R." And one little boy shot up his hand and said, "He recycled."

Yes, it's funny. We're here on Easter Day, and our festive greeting "Christ is Risen," rings out and we should all know the answer to the Sunday School teacher's question. But step back a moment and we might start to wonder. "Well, isn't recycling what really happens to us after we die? Our earthly, made-of-the-dust-of-the-earth bodies, return to from where they came, to be recycled into the very stuff of which they are made?" There is even a growing organic green movement for burials, in which caskets are made of organic material, even becoming a container from which a tree may grow. Recycling has become part of the fabric of our lives, and most us feel guilty if we put our plastic milk cartons, glass bottles, and newspapers in the regular trash. Christians ought to be very involved in any way we can caring for the resources of this earth. After all, everything here is part of God's good creation. Even our bodies. Recycling is simply one more way we can be responsible caretakers of this planet and all that is in it.

But as funny as the little boy's response may be; and even though it might get us to wonder if there's profound spiritual truth behind it, I don't think that's the "R" answer the teacher was looking for. Nor do I believe it's the right "R" to proclaim today. It seems to me the real humor of the day is to be seen in the proclamation "He has been raised." "Raised" is the "r" word that takes center stage today. "Raised," all the other forms of this joyous word: "risen," "rose," even "resurrection," that makes us smile, even laugh, at all the forces arrayed against Jesus and against the Father's love for his creation. Just look at how often the word appears today. It is front and center of the young man's announcement to the women coming to the tomb to care for

his body; “He has been raised, he is not here.” Peter and Paul, apostles to the Jews and to the Gentiles declare Jesus was raised on the third day after his death. It’s in every hymn, throughout our prayers. The risen Jesus takes center stage. How can we not see the humor in this? It’s like he suddenly appears, and goes: “ta da!”

Now I could try to explain what it means to be raised from the dead and how that isn’t the same thing as being recycled. But then I’d be falling into the same trap as someone who tries to explain a joke to someone who doesn’t get it. Jokes that need to be explained simply lose their punch. And Easter is the biggest joke of all. A joke played on all the forces that try to squash love into the ground. A joke on all the powerful and mighty who spend their time in lofty towers thinking they are looking down on all the little people, only to find themselves cast out of their towers and bringing up the rear, sweeping up after the great parade of misfits and sinners has danced their way into the Kingdom of God.

But even those shocked expressions of those who thought they would be first and now sent to the last will start to give way, give way to a look of surprise, then a slight up turn of the mouth, and as the realization begins to grow, even they will break out into a smile and a laugh for they too will find themselves caught up in the great parade, invited to the banquet, partakers of the feast.

The joke is not yet complete, however. Still more who slumber in the quiet sleep of death will awake, with that look of astonishment which quickly turns to laughter when they finally get the joke and see that they too are included in on the great reversal.

Alleluia. Christ is Risen! (He is risen indeed!) Nothing could be funnier or better. Amen.