

Call to Worship

The life of Jesus is stronger than death and wider than the highest heavens. It moves through the boundaries and beyond the barriers of fear and pain.

Weeping may stay all night, but by morning, joy! The risen Christ comes to us.

The passion of Jesus is deeper than the valleys and higher than the mountains. It is colored with kindness and spreads life past doubts and confusion.

We will open the doors for Christ. May we see the great joy of God as we are sent the Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit.

Prayer of Invocation

Lord Jesus, though the celebration of Easter Day is past, the reality of your presence with us is ongoing joy and wonder. Come to us in this hour with your life-giving, transforming power, so that we look not back to who we were or where we have been, but forward to who we are becoming as your disciples. We rejoice that because of your love, we and the world can be formed into a new creation of your design. You summons us to share in your work. Equip us, we pray. Amen.

The Word Psalm 30

I exalt you, LORD, because you pulled me up; you didn't let my enemies celebrate over me.

LORD, my God, I cried out to you for help, and you healed me. LORD, you brought me¹ up from the grave, brought me back to life from among those going down to the pit.

You who are faithful to the LORD, sing praises to him; give thanks to his holy name!

His anger lasts for only a second, but his favor lasts a lifetime.

Weeping may stay all night, but by morning, joy!

When I was comfortable, I said, "I will never stumble."

Because it pleased you, LORD, you made me a strong mountain.

But then you hid your presence. I was terrified. I cried out to you, LORD. I begged my Lord for mercy: What is to be gained by my spilled blood, by my going down into the pit?

Does dust thank you? Does it proclaim your faithfulness?

LORD, listen and have mercy on me! LORD, be my helper!"

You changed my mourning into dancing. You took off my funeral clothes and dressed me up in joy so that my whole being might sing praises to you and never stop.

LORD, my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

Living the Word

What kind of shoes do frogs wear on vacation? Open Toad Sandals

What kind of story is Black Beauty? A Pony Tail

Knock. Knock... Wanda... You Wanda hear some more?

Knock. Knock... Wade... Wade a bit and I will share some more...

Jesus loves a good party. He performed his first miracle at a wedding reception at Cana, turning water into wine. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus tells us that the overjoyed father threw a big party for his returning son. "We are going to have a feast, a celebration," the father declared, with tears of joy in his eyes, "because this son of mine was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found." (Luke 15:23-24)

In Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant countries, Easter Monday traditionally was observed by the faithful as "a day of joy and laughter" with parties and picnics to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. It also has been called 'Bright Monday', 'White Monday' and 'Emmaus Day' in various countries. The faithful played practical jokes on each

other, drenched each other with water, sang and danced. It was a time for clergy and lay people to tell jokes and to have fun.

The following Sunday was called 'Bright Sunday' and along with Easter Monday was a part of the celebration. These customs may be rooted in the writings of the early church theologians like Augustine, that God played a practical joke on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead. "God's supreme joke played on that old imposter death."

"The Easter laugh" the early theologians called it. And the theme has echoed down through the centuries. St. Francis of Assisi advised: "Leave sadness to the devil. The devil has reason to be sad." Meister Eckhart, a 13th century mystic, wrote: "God laughed and begat the Son. Together they laughed and begat the Holy Spirit. And from the laughter of the Three, the universe was born."

Martin Luther wrote: "God is not a God of sadness, but the devil is. Christ is a God of joy. It is pleasing to the dear God whenever thou rejoicest or laughest from the bottom of thy heart." John Wesley said: "Sour Godliness is the devil's religion."

Dr Terry Lindvall an authority on the wit and humor of CS Lewis, suggested that April Fools Day should be put in the calendar of the Christian year. Lindvall wrote: "There are two kinds of fools in the world: damned fools and what the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 4:10 calls 'fools for Christ's sake' Paul himself is the one to legitimize April Fool's Day for Christians. The cross is foolish to those who do not believe; it is salvation, hope, love and joy to those who do believe. It is a divine joke on Satan, the great deceiver.

April Fool's Day, in most years is a day of preparation for the divine folly of the Easter surprise, this year it was four days before Palm Sunday. April Fool's Day offers a choice to us. Presently we are all fools. The choice lies in – for whom we play the fool: for ourselves or for Christ."

Many American churches are resurrecting this old Easter custom begun by the Greeks in the early centuries of Christianity-"Holy Humor Sunday" celebrations of Jesus' resurrection on the Sunday after Easter.

There is an organized group called The Fellowship of Merry Christians. For 35 years they have been putting out a newsletter every month entitled The Joyful Noise-letter, that has provided a regular supply of hilarious cartoons, jokes, one-liners, quotable quotes, uplifting anecdotes and articles, and joyful Scriptural references.

This next joke is one of theirs: *A pastor was speaking to a group of second-graders about the resurrection of Jesus when one student asked, "What did Jesus say right after He came out of the grave?" The pastor explained that the Gospels do not tell us what He said. The hand of one little girl shot up. "I know what He said: He said, 'Tah-dah!'"*

Did you know that there are 42 references to laughter in the Bible, not many when we consider how many verses the Bible contains, but still they have something to teach us. Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, 'a time for everything: a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.'

Some Christians condemn themselves because they can't always present a smiling, laughing face. God never intended that we laugh for prolonged periods of time. We will experience many emotions in our Christian journey, we are promised laughter some of the time.

Remember Sarah, who laughed when God told her she would have a son in her old age. I admire Sarah for laughing. I know that even at this point in my life I wouldn't find that news too amusing! Still laughter is a blessing and a relief for all of us.

Laughter is mentioned among the beatitudes found in Luke 6: "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh." Along with the blessings of the beatitudes,

comes this warning, also concerning laughter. Verse 25 says: "Woe to you who are well fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep."

What do you call a sleeping bull? A bull dozer.

What did the sky diver say when her pack didn't open? Chute!

We can laugh at word funnies. But we shouldn't laugh at people. We can laugh with people, but not at their expense. You are saying "I know that, learned it as a child" Most of us did heard it as a child – but did we learn? We need to be careful when we poke fun at others because of race, size, occupation, gender and any other way we could be hurting the feeling of someone else.

Times to laugh and times not to laugh. As a Christian we should be able to distinguish... I invite you this week to laugh often, but take a close look to see if any of those laughs come at the expense of someone else.

Knock. Knock... Hayden...Hay den let's move on...

Knock. Knock...Sarah...Sarah joke doctor in the house?

An article in the AARP magazine (yes I am wise enough to read that) listed six ways to stay healthy. Number one: Smile when you say that! Bob Hope made it to his 100th birthday, and so did George Burns. Coincidence? Maybe not.

Laughter releases endorphins, those 'feel good' hormones suspected of boosting immunity, and that might make you more resistant to disease, says Michael Irwin, MD of UCLA's School of Medicine.

He goes on to say: "At the very least, laughter reduces stress hormones, which we know have a bad effect on immunity. If you are the strong silent type, a good belly laugh now and then may be especially important. Doctors used to think hard-charging Type A's were at heightened risk for heart disease, but we know now it's having a so-called Type D personality – someone who bottles up emotions – that really causes an increased risk of heart disease and possibly cancer."

Along with its stress-busting properties, hearty laughter provides an aerobic workout similar to that of more intense exercise such as jogging. Research suggests that as little as 15 minutes of laughter daily may help prevent a heart attack by expanding the lining of blood vessels to improve blood flow.

Laughter is 'one of God's greatest gifts' that Christians need to share and celebrate more often. Humor is a need of human existence. It makes you feel good, as God intended it to. While the Puritans settlers in the United States frowned mightily at anything less than total seriousness in church, many Christians today are encouraged by doses lightheartedness along their faith journey. Today's seekers, as well as longtime Christians, often find their faith strengthened and enriched by perspectives that find laughter and humor in life.

When you are trying to deal with something very serious or very controversial, laughter is almost always a good way to break through people's defenses. Laughter is a great equalizer, with the ability to unite and bond those who share it. Humor is a way to break down barriers and connect with people, although, using humor requires caution as well.

Humor that can lead to joy...finding humor in our own imperfections, being able to laugh at yourself and where you've fallen short; these kind of things connect us in the church to real humanity. And through this others can relate and understand us better.

One of the greatest compliments I can be paid in my ministry is when someone comes up and says, 'You give us permission to be ourselves.' That is what humor does. Humor takes the deadly serious edge off of being ourselves. Churches thrive when hope and joy are emphasized.

Congregations 'come to see life as more than just a serious crawl toward death...they see a life of possibility and hope. Many Christians use the word 'joy' but look very sad when they say it. You don't have to be sad and unhappy to be a Christian. God wants us to laugh. God gave us the gift of laughter.

*What do you feel when you have to throw out an old pair of underwear? Brief grief!
What stops a food fight in the cafeteria? A Peas Treaty
(Finally a good use for Peas)*

When it comes to jokes, no one can top the Almighty. In many ways Easter is the best joke of all. "You thought Jesus was dead, but He's not! It's the sense that God saying death is not the last word. Death is not the end! With the resurrection, God leaves people with a profound sense of hope and surprise. The joyful message is 'we worship the God of the living, not the God of the dead.'

It means my life and your life, is caught up in the hope and future of God, and that is what believing means. Easter signals 'the extraordinary reality that God is not through with us...and that's delightful and joyful. This surprise that God pulls on the world is the greatest laugh of all!

Knock. Knock...Senior...Seeing your enjoying this so much it is almost too bad that it is time to pray:

This is "The Clown's Prayer" of Smiles Unlimited, a clown ministry to hospitals, nursing homes and prisons, based in Indianapolis:

"Lord, as I stumble through this life, help me to create more laughter than tears, dispense more happiness than gloom, spread more cheer than despair. Never let me become so indifferent that I will fail to see the wonder in the eyes of a child or the twinkle in the eyes of the aged. Never let me forget that my total effort is to cheer people, make them happy and forget at least for a moment all of the unpleasant things in their lives. And, Lord, in my final moment, may I hear you whisper: 'When you made my people smile, you made Me smile.'