



St. Michael's Church
CHARLESTON, SC

EASTER SUNDAY APRIL 1, 2018
APRIL FOOLS DAY

ROMANS: 6-3-13
MATTHEW 28:1-10

PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

HELP US LORD TO BE SO CONNECTED TO YOU THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE SERVANTS
OF OTHERS.

TAKE OUR LIPS AND SPEAK THROUGH THEM,
OUR MINDS AND THINK THROUGH THEM,
AND TAKE OUR HEARTS, AND SET THEM ON FIRE.

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Alleluia... Christ is Risen!

The Lord is Risen...Indeed!

It is a profound irony that today, Easter, is both the most powerful and important day of the year for all humanity, while at the same time, and the first time since 1956, it is also April Fools Day! More on that paradox in a moment...

Safe to say, we all love a great April fools prank! I remember some years ago Elizabeth and I walking around Colonial Lake at night, when we see a friend of ours walking with her husband. So we get into April Fools mode! We hide behind azalea bushes, and our timing is perfect! We jump out, and in fear they nearly face plant into the lake! It was amazing. Sure they didn't talk to us for awhile, but ohh so worth it.

One of the best April Fools pranks of all time happened in 1974 in Sitka, Alaska, a small town under a long dormant volcano called Mt. Edgecombe. On April 1 that year, men women and children wake up to see clouds of black smoke rising from the central crater. It terrifies everyone, for they know the next step most likely is a lava-flowing total eruption! But little did they know a man by the name of Porky Bickar, using a helicopter,

had flown hundreds of old tires up in the air and dropped them into the crater and somehow lights them on fire! The results are a smoking crater and terrorized residents!

Easter-April Fools, only God could bring together both on the same day. Because for many today, it represents a fork in the road. Is Christianity, and the Easter resurrection-truth? Or a fairy tale? Do we believe it? Are we really living out the faith, or is it just a nice tale, in the way of the Easter bunny? Truth...or prank? I submit to you my friends it is the most beautiful truth in the world.

How Adam and Eve sin, and how we inherit from them a sin nature. How The Bible says if we don't deal with our sin, we cannot inherit eternal life. How the Jews dealt with sin by sacrificing lambs, then Jesus coming on the scene as the Lamb Of God, to take away our sin through his death on the cross. And how Between Good Friday and Easter morning, Jesus, as our creed says, died, descended into hell to rescue the departed saints, and then bring them to their eternal home, and proclaim victory over the fallen angels who are kept in hell. Then this morning, Jesus rises again from the dead to tell the world about it!

As Billy Graham loved to say on Easter, "God proved his love for us on the cross. When Christ hung, bled, died, and rose again, it was God saying to us, I love you. I have rescued you!" Imagine what Billy Graham is seeing right now in heaven!

Every individual, has to decide – Truth or prank? It's safe to say on Easter some of us are really struggling with that question. If this describes you, you are not alone! All of us go through doubts, and the "How could's." How could a loving God allow X ? It must be April Fools. Yet today, in the context of the Resurrection, I want to give you another way to look at the words fool and foolish.

The Bible mentions the word fool almost 70 times, but never does it define a fool as one lacking intelligence. The Bible defines a fool as one who mis-perceives reality because they have failed to take God into account in their life, and failed to make God the center of their lives. Which is why Jesus called certain people fools, not to mock their IQ, but because they chose to live for things of this world: The money, the stuff. The **created things** and not the **creator**. So, being a fool in the Bible is failing to make God the center of our life.

At the same time, Paul in Corinthians says we are to be fools for Christ. What does that mean? The best definition I could come up with is from late night entertainer, Porter Gaud Graduate, and Charleston native Steven Colbert. During his show in 2015, he defined a fool for Christ as one who is willing to be wrong in society, wrong according to our time, but Right according to our conscience as guided by the Holy Spirit.

A fool for Christ as one who is willing to be wrong in society, wrong according to our time, but Right according to our conscience as guided by the Holy Spirit and, I would add, Holy Scripture. Therefore this morning I'm inviting you to suspend your disbelief even just for the next few minutes, and be a fool for Christ.

In fact, let me introduce to you two fools for Christ right now. Mary and Mary Magdalene. They are the women who in Matthew 28 are going to the tomb to simply anoint the dead body of Jesus with oil. They had seen Jesus tortured, killed on the cross, and put into the tomb. These ladies are going to the tomb with no hope and no expectation of anything other than to anoint a dead body. Yet, as they arrive at the tomb, the Bible says that in the middle of their grief an un-natural earthquake rocks them. Un-Natural because the Bible says the earthquake was caused by an Angel of God descending from heaven! Who knew angels had heavy feet! The angel before their very eyes opens the tomb, and then begins speaking to the ladies about the Son of God! Put yourselves into the shoes of those ladies! Imagine seeing an angel handling and opening a tomb by removing a 2-ton stone! Historians believe it would have taken 21 humans to put that stone where the angel did! The guards take one look, shake, tremble, and then pass out like dead men! Roman guards are the toughest of the toughest! A typical Roman guard unit would consist of 16 burly men, each trained to protect six feet of ground. Four of them would be stationed in front of the tomb, and the other twelve would have formed a semi-circle in front of the four. Imagine all of them shaking and falling like dead men!

Then the angel speaks four very clear and specific things to the Mary's:

1. Don't be afraid, this is all part of God's plan
2. Jesus is not here, he has risen---As he said he would!
3. Come in and See
4. And go tell the disciples!

In other words, to prove the truth of it all, the angel asks the Ladies to believe, take a step of faith, and share the news! The Mary's, like us are in that moment of decision: prank or Truth? The ladies somehow manage to move through doubt, and take a gigantic leap of faith. They turn into Fools for Christ, willing to be wrong to a Society who saw Jesus die, willing to be wrong even to the disciples who saw with their own eyes that Jesus had died. They run to tell the disciples anyway, and as they take that leap of faith, they literally run smack dab into Jesus! The same Jesus they saw dead on a cross and in a tomb just days before. Here He is-alive! Jesus even speaks to them, saying, "Greetings. Don't be afraid. Go. You will see me there." His voice, just like they had heard so many times before, alive from the dead, just as He said he would be!

My friends, yes! Help Wanted today! Fools For Christ! People willing to be wrong in society! Wrong in our time, but eternally right to Jesus! Fools for Christ willing to make that leap of faith! Here is the Good News: being a fool for Christ reveals the heart of Christ.

In their decision, the ladies experience two beautiful truths about the heart of Jesus.

First, when they take a leap of faith as fools for Christ, the resurrected Jesus shows up! They run smack dab into Jesus, hands outstretched, with a heart as big as the world. When as fools for Christ we take that leap of Faith, the resurrected Jesus is there-trust him!

A French woman named Julie owes her life to one man who took that leap. Last Saturday, Police Officer Arnauld Beltrame was called to a supermarket in a small French town where Islamist Terrorists had taken several hostages, Julie among them. Upon arriving, Officer Beltrame, in a total Fool for Christ move, asks one of the terrorists if he could take the place of a hostage. Oh so wrong in the eyes of the world, he knew well his chance of survival was nil. The terrorists agree, and he's whisked away to a back room, and stripped of his guns. And there switches place with Julie. Julie would live because Arnaud was willing to give his life up for her. And he did. Arnaud died that day.

My friends, not only is this an amazing image of what Jesus has done for you and me on the cross, dying in our place that we might live, but it is also an example of being a fool for Christ! What I haven't told you is that Arnaud became a Christian in 2008, converting to Christ as a young adult. Arnaud knew the resurrected Jesus was with Him in life and death. He wasn't afraid to die because the resurrected Christ was with him on earth and forever.

As fools for Christ, when we take a leap of faith, The resurrected Jesus is there in life and death! We don't have to fear death

Second, when we take that leap, Jesus will never give up on us. He loves us so much. Jesus never gives up on us, even if we have been trying to keep him at arms length, including Mary Magdalene! Mary Magdalene lived the first half of her life making really bad decisions. We know this because the Bible says in Luke that Jesus cast seven demons from her! Jesus never gives up on us! He releases us from our demons, despair, and failures. They will never define us! Jesus has the power to release us from that which haunts us. Jesus not only does not give up on Mary Magdalene, but Jesus makes sure that she is the first to see him alive after the Resurrection, even before a single male! A radical move in the ancient world. In fact, Mary Magdalene would be the very first evangelist, telling the world about Jesus.

Being a fool for Christ reveals the heart and character of Christ. He meets us when we take that leap of faith. Jesus is Lord of the second, tenth, and on into infinity chance, right up to the day of judgment. He will never give up on you.

Years ago, a man from Michigan converted to Christ, becoming a fool for Christ. Much to his parents angst, he becomes a missionary to a field hospital in Africa. Every two weeks he would travel by bicycle the 2-day journey from his hospital, through the jungle, to a nearby city for supplies. On one of these journeys, he arrives in the city, gets money out of the bank and purchases supplies. Before he starts back, he sees two men fighting. After the fight, the missionary treats the injured one and talks to Him about Jesus. He then bikes back, stays over night in the jungle, and arrives at the hospital two days later.

Weeks later he repeats the journey, arrives in the city, and the young man he treated comes up to him and says, “Last time you were here my gang and I followed you into the jungle to kill you and take your money and supplies. But just as we were about to move into your camp, we saw you were surrounded by 26 armed guards.” The missionary laughs and says I was totally alone! “No,” the native says, “my five friends also saw them, we all counted them...26.”

Months later this missionary goes back to his Michigan church to preach and tells them this supernatural story. Right in the middle of telling it, one of the men in the congregation jumps to his feet, interrupts the missionary and asks when it happened. The missionary tells him the date. The man says, “On the night of your incident in Africa, it was morning here. I was golfing and about to putt when I felt the urge to pray for you. The urging of the Lord was so strong, I called men in this church to meet me here in the sanctuary to pray for you. Would all of those men who met with me on that day stand up?” They do. The missionary wasn’t concerned with who they were, he was too busy counting how many men he saw. 26!”

My friends, don’t be so wise in this world, that we become fools in the next.

Help Wanted: Fools For Christ.

The Resurrected Jesus is here, and He will never give up on you.