

**MORE THAN EGGS:
EARLY APRIL FOOL!
MATTHEW 28:1-15
MARCH 31, 2013
EASTER SUNDAY**

READ AT BEGINNING OF THE SERVICE: MATTHEW 28:1-10

In the February 14 edition of the San Antonio Express News there was this report:

People in California, Michigan, Montana and New Mexico have heard over the Emergency Alert System warnings about attacking zombies.

Apparently hackers got into the nation's public warning system and broadcast messages saying things like,

"Local authorities in your area have reported the bodies of the dead are rising from their graves and attacking the living.

Do not attempt to approach or apprehend these bodies as they are considered extremely dangerous."

What will the hackers say when they're caught by the authorities?

Just kidding?

An early April Fool's Day joke?

In doing a little research I learned that April Fool's Day, though not a national holiday anywhere,

is recognized in many nations,

and dates all the way back to at least 1392.

Today I'd like to suggest the resurrection of Jesus was God's April Fool's joke on Satan, on the religious authorities, and on the governmental authorities.

You see, this was their big chance to get Jesus out of the way.

Satan wanted to get rid of him,

because the world was filled with people who were separated from God by their sin.

But Satan knew that Jesus intended to somehow

set them free from sin and reconcile them with their Creator.

And we can't have that.

So let's get rid of him.

The religious authorities were not thrilled with Jesus, either.

He was breaking the religious rules left and right.

He was also getting a lot of attention,

which meant the religious authorities were not getting the attention.

He was getting a lot of attention,

which could lead to some social disturbances, even riots.

That would get the attention of the Romans,

and that would probably bring more soldiers, "peace-keepers," to town.

And we can't have that.

So let's get rid of him.

The Roman authorities were not Jesus' friends, either.

They could not have anyone claiming to be king or Lord of anything without Caesar's anointing.

This talk of messiah was dangerous.

The Jewish nation had been a flash-point for trouble in the past,

so the Romans would be wary of anything out of the ordinary.
 And this Jesus movement was anything but ordinary.
 The power and authority they associated with him,
 the crowds that gathered around him from time to time.
 The big parade on Palm Sunday,
 the violence of him chasing people out of the temple.
 The tension felt like it was all verging on riots.
 We can't have that.
 So let's get rid of him.

And they thought they'd done it.

They thought they'd gotten rid of him.
 A ridiculously short trial with no real testimony, just accusations,
 a brutal beating,
 a crucifixion,
 a hasty burial in someone else's tomb,
 and all was quiet on the Jewish Sabbath.

They all saw death as the ultimate power with which to defeat Jesus.

They thought it was done, and now they could move on.

But, in fact, Satan, the Jewish religious authorities, the Roman Empire, they all struck out.

We heard the resurrection story read at the beginning of the service.

Jesus, dead and buried, did not stay dead and buried.

An earthquake, an angel from heaven,

 the stone rolled back, and an appearance to the women.

(Mt.28:1-10)

 There was a twist.

 The first witnesses to the resurrection were women.

 The first apostles to go and tell someone else that "He is risen"
 were women.

I can almost see Jesus sticking his head out of the tomb and saying,

 "Just kidding! April Fool!"

He rose from the dead, alive, better than ever, never to die again.

 Victorious over sin, death, Satan,

 and all the religious and governmental authorities.

Oh, they didn't realize it for a while.

 But it would soon become clear.

 And then they'd try to cover it up.

MATTHEW 28:11-15

The resurrection is God's cosmic whoopee cushion for the dark powers aligned against Jesus!

 April Fool!

But they could not be seen to be the fool.

 They crucified Jesus.

 He was dead and buried.

 They had to make sure everyone though he stayed dead.

So they concocted this story,

 that the guards fell asleep, all of them at once,

 that Jesus' followers had snuck in, rolled away the stone, took the body, and carried it away.

 A story that, frankly, you'd have to be an April fool to believe.

 First, the guards fell asleep?

 Did you notice the soldiers had to be paid good money

 and promised protection by the priests and elders

to get them to go along with this story?
 It was because, by law, a guard falling asleep on duty could be executed.
 I don't know about you,
 but I think that threat would keep me awake.
 But we are to believe they all fell asleep,
 and they all were asleep at the same time.
 Doesn't seem likely to me.
 Then Jesus' followers snuck in to steal the body.
 First, why would they steal his body?
 They weren't expecting a resurrection,
 so why would they want to fake one?
 Second, they supposedly snuck in,
 rolled back that huge stone over the face of the tomb,
 and carried off the body,
 all without waking even one of those sleeping guards.
 Doesn't seem likely to me.
 This story has too many holes in it to be believable...
 except to a real April Fool who does not want to believe in the resurrection.
 There are people who willfully do not want to believe, you know.
 German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg said,
 "The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that
 nobody would question it except for two things:
 First, it is a very unusual event.
 (He was a master of understatement.)
 And second, if you believe it happened,
 you have to change the way you live."
 There's the rub.
 If this is true, Jesus really is who he says he is,
 so he has an absolute claim on my life.
 I ought to change the way I live.
 So some people don't want that,
 so they refuse to believe,
 regardless of truth or evidence.
 I would suggest they are the April Fools.

It seems more likely to me that God raised Jesus from the dead.

The truth is, God made fools out of all of them that day.

He took the punishment for our sins on the cross,
 and then he conquered death and opened the gates to eternity for us in the resurrection.
 He fooled Satan, the religious authorities, the governmental authorities, and even Jesus' friends.
 Even his followers didn't know it was coming,
 and they were totally shocked when it did.

It seemed like foolishness to many people,
 even later when Paul was preaching Christ and planting churches.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25

Jews wanted miracles, signs, that indicate great power.

Greeks wanted wisdom, philosophy.

What Jesus brought was the cross and the resurrection.

Weakness and foolishness, by the world's standards.

Weakness on the cross,

and foolishness in thinking there's such a thing as resurrection.
 Except it was all true and real.
 So who is really the fool?
 God does not operate in ways we might demand.
 He does not always do what we might expect.
 But he does wonderful things,
 death defying things,
 April Fool's kinds of things.
 And on the basis of Jesus' early April Fool's joke,
 we can have hope.
 We can have hope in any and every circumstance.
 Because the resurrection of Jesus means death has been defeated, once for all.
 At least for all who would trust Jesus and follow him.
 Death has been defeated once and for all.
 If death has been defeated, what is there to worry about?
 The worst Satan can throw at you means very little.
 What's the absolute worst that can happen to me?
 I die.
 And then there's the resurrection.
 And before that day,
 what about all those smaller bad things we have to deal with?
 They're not the end of the world.
 We tried and tried and tried, but couldn't have a baby.
 I lost my job and haven't found another.
 The diagnosis is the dreaded "C" word, cancer.
 There is sniping and rumor-mongering at the office.
 Your tax bill comes in a LOT higher than you expected.
 If God has defeated death,
 those things are a snap for him.
 We don't know exactly what he'll do with those things.
 But we know he's not done with you.
 He's not defeated.
 He's always got another trick up his sleeve.
 So we can always, always, always hope.

Jill and I have driven Toyotas for years.
 Corollas, Camry's, the Rav4.
 There are cheaper brands to buy,
 but Toyotas are solid and they have a great record of repair.
 And our experience has borne that out.
 But in the last couple of years we've both received recall notices.
 Those lovely letters that say,
 "Oops. We goofed. You could die."
 From Toyota!
 Even from Toyota.

It is true that, in this world everything can and will break sooner or later.
 Everything breaks.
 Everything wears out.
 Everything dies.
 On an earth like this, groaning under the curse of death, there's only one ultimate hope:

Resurrection.

And what a hope it is!

As unexpected as a well-timed April Fool's joke.

The resurrection of Jesus,

and all that it promises for us and for the rest of God's creation.

A new, immortal body.

A new humanity.

A new song to sing.

A new heavens and new earth.

A new Jerusalem.

A new creation.

And it all began with an early April Fool's joke,

Jesus walking out of the tomb,

the conqueror, the victor,

and the source of our hope.