

## Who Played the Fool

By: Penny Holste

April 1, 2018. Easter and April Fools' Day fall on the same date this year. Some say we Christians are foolish to celebrate a man who came back from the dead. How believable is it after all? But Pastor Penny tells us that in this story it's Jesus who plays the fool. He allows himself to be arrested, doesn't speak for himself when given the opportunity, and while being crucified he prays forgiveness for those taunting him. Why does he do all this? For us. In playing the fool for us, Jesus took away our fear of death so that he can help us with life.

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

We begin this morning in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I saw an Easter card that had a picture of Jesus on the front, and the words, "They thought I was dead." And then you open it up and it says, "April Fools." Have any of you played an April Fool's joke yet today? Anybody have one played on them? Was it a good one? No, it was not a good one — which is kind of how we feel when the joke's on us. We typically don't want to be fooled, or to feel foolish, or to play the fool, you might say. Now, there are many people who would say we're pretty foolish this morning, as Christians, to come together and celebrate a man who came back from the dead. They would say that's pretty unbelievable. And you know, it always surprises me because most people believe in God. And God is a force that is able to do amazing things, like bring people up from the dead. But somehow it's hard to make the jump from God to Jesus. And you know, I understand. It's hard to believe. It's hard for us to believe at times too. But I think if there is someone who has played the fool in this whole story, it's Jesus. It's God.

Because how foolish for a god to come to earth as a human being, and be born even into a poor family at that. How foolish for Jesus, once he was an adult, to leave everything — to leave his job, to leave his family, to leave his home, to leave the chance to live a normal life, get married and have children — and instead spend three years on the road, on his mission, eating wherever he could, sleeping wherever he could, really pushing himself to go to every town he could get to, to give his word of love and forgiveness. And then how foolish of Jesus to rub the important religious leaders the wrong way, to heal a blind man on the Sabbath and get their ire up. Or to befriend people they considered to be unclean. Or to stop the buying and selling in the temple, which was overshadowing the true worship. All these things made the religious rulers, who are very powerful, angry. How foolish. And how foolish of Jesus to let himself be arrested. And then when he was given the opportunity to speak for himself in his defense, he was silent. How foolish to let himself be crucified, and while on the cross to pray forgiveness for the very people who were taunting him as he believed. Why? Why did Jesus play the fool? It was for us. It was to give us something. It was to give us life that begins here and goes into eternity.

I remember the first time I went to Chicago, and our family went up to an observation deck on the then tallest building in Chicago, which was the Prudential Building. And I looked out at the city and I was amazed. There were streets and cars and trees and houses as far as I could see. In my mind the city had no end. And that is like the gift that we are given on Easter: a life that has no end. Death is simply a portal to a new and better life. And so Easter reminds us that we do not have to be afraid to die. But we have a lot of other fears besides death to contend with. Fears in life, fears that often are revealed in our complaints or our self accusations: my grades aren't good enough, my resume isn't strong enough, my

body isn't thin enough, my performance isn't good enough. I don't have enough time, I don't have enough money, I don't have enough strength, I don't have enough authority, I don't have enough friends, I don't have enough years left in my life. All these fears keep us from seeing others. They turn us in toward ourselves, keep us from seeing and caring what's happening in other people's lives.

There is a church historian (she has died now) with the strange name of Phyllis Tickle. She was a wonderful woman. We were able to hear her when she came to Eden Seminary and speak once. She writes about the time that she had a near-death experience at age 21. She was on a new medication to prevent miscarriages, and she stopped breathing. And she said as they were working to resuscitate her, she was above, looking down at herself. And all of a sudden the ceiling opened up and she found herself in that tunnel they always talk about. And in that tunnel she experienced absolute peace. And then a voice asked her, "Do you want to come?" And she said, "No, I want to go back and have my baby." And then she began to breathe again. But after experiencing that death, that amazing peace, she was never afraid to die again. To her dying day she was not afraid. And she said it made a difference in her life. And this is what she says: "Once the fear of death goes, then you're not so afraid of life. And you're free to love. You're just a different person."

If Jesus has taken away the sting of death as we believe, then he certainly has the power to help us with life. You know, the resurrection isn't the end of his story. He is here. He is with us. And when we know that he felt we were precious enough to die for, it also takes the sting out of the feelings we have if we don't like our body, or we don't like the gifts that we've been given. And when we know he is with us, it gives us courage to take risks for other people. It gives us the strength to stand up for people if they're being abused or bad mouthed, people who are different, they look different, they speak differently, they have a different sexual orientation. We have courage to stand up for them. Jesus gives us the power and the desire to help. And we find ourselves spending time helping someone, even if we will never see the results of our efforts.

Christians live differently, not because we feel we're so much more open-minded or more honest, more caring or better than other people. That comparison game, you know, that's part of the the fears we've left behind. No, we try to live as Christ lived — for the same reason that we wear a T-shirt or have a bumper sticker that promotes a certain team or a certain school or a certain political view. We do it because we want to be associated with Jesus. We want to be with him. We want to be part of his mission. And so our whole lives are a tribute to this loving savior, this loving God. We hold our lives up as a tribute to God. We say to Jesus, who played the fool to give us life here and eternally.

Amen.

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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