

EASTER 2015
“Basking in the Light”

Texts: Matthew 28:1-10
John 8:12

Preached: 4/5/15



Long ago in southern Germany, in Bavaria, during the late Middle Ages, Christians were celebrating a rather unusual Easter custom. The priest would close the Easter Mass by leaving the altar area, coming down among the common worshipers and lead the people in, what was called in Latin, the "Risus Paschalis," which means "the Easter laughter." The priest would recount funny stories, sing comical songs, tell jokes and the church would ring with laughter.

The point was obvious then, if not now. God's people laughing was a tangible testimony to the joy of this great day -- Jesus Christ alive and loose among us. All of the forces that conspired to entrap him, condemn him, kill him and lay him in his tomb, all of the darkness that seemed so final and permanent, was instantly overcome in the resurrection. The vaunted powers of evil have become a laughing stock.

Some Eastern Orthodox traditions still follow this ridiculous tradition of telling jokes on Easter. Why can't we?!

So, in the tradition of "Risus Paschalis" here are a few holy jokes:

First a couple decidedly religious:



Question: How many Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb?

Answer: SEVENTEEN - 6 to be on the initial Task Force doing the feasibility study, 6 to staff the committee to decide which kind of light bulb to get, two to research the cheapest place to purchase the bulb and then actually make the purchase, one to finally replace the bulb and two others to comment on how the work was done all wrong!

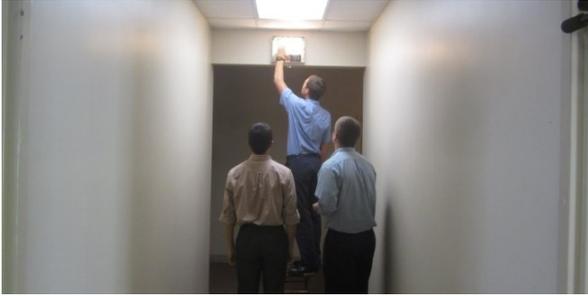
Question: How many Charismatics does it take to change a light bulb?

Answer: TEN - One to change the bulb and nine to pray against the spirit of darkness.

Question: How many members of a church that is over 100 years old does it take to change a light bulb?

Answer: 20 – One to change the bulb, 19 to talk about how much they miss the old one.

And now some more secular in flavor!:



Q: How many MicroSoft tech support people dies it take to change a light bulb?

A: We have an exact copy of the light bulb here, and it seems to be working fine. Can you tell me what kind of system you have? Okay. Now exactly how dark is it? Okay, there could be 4 or 5 things wrong...have you tried the light switch?

And, in honor of tax season:

Q: How many bureaucrats does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: Seven-- one to supervise, one to arrange for the electricity to be shut off, one to make sure that safety and quality standards are maintained, one to monitor compliance with local, state, and federal regulations, one to manage personnel relations, one to fill out the paperwork and one to screw the light bulb into the water faucet.

There was a time "Lightbulb changing" jokes were all the rage. Every group of people, every profession, every religion you can imagine has been the brunt of them.

Light bulbs aren't that hard to change! The focus rather pokes fun at how individuals and organizations deal with every-day challenges. Mostly these jokes aren't about light at all, but about having a good laugh.



Today we are about both! Today is a good day to laugh at the surprising and amazing Good News of the Gospel. It is also a day to celebrate the Light of the World, to celebrate and sing and bask in that Light.

This is a season filled with light...the light of hope, healing, love, forgiveness, new beginnings.

[The pictures scrolling behind me all have to do with light, some are personal, some are Pittsburgh, some are animals, some are people, they all are spiritual, all can remind us of the Light of the World. With each picture look at the light and think of a similar situation you have witnessed or might witness in the future.]



We have this amazing spot in our yard that is a true micro-climate. It's a stone bench I crafted right beside the wall of our white garage. Early in the morning, when the sun is shining, say between 7 and 10 am, that spot is, by far, the warmest spot in our yard, sometimes easily 20 degrees warmer than anywhere else outside. The sun shines on the white siding and the stone bench and the wall reflect the light and the warmth and the garage blocks the wind out of the north.

Some days I read my devotion there, other days I just sit and watch the birds or the bugs...they like the warm spot, too. I never fail to say a prayer of thanksgiving for that special spot. And I can't help remembering Jesus' words: "I am the Light of the World." I look forward to the upcoming Spring days when I will be basking in the light on my stone bench!

The resurrection story in Matthew's Gospel begins: *After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.*



They had no hope of really seeing anything. The tomb had been sealed. Jesus' lifeless body had been laid in it. There was nothing to see but the large rock which had been rolled over the entrance.

Yet, the two women had already seen something. "The first day of the week was dawning." If you've ever been up at dawn and outside, you know it is a special time. The light is different then...new...hopeful...holy. The women made their way to the tomb by the light of a new day. When they arrived at the tomb on that quiet morning things started happening fast – the ground moved beneath their feet, the stone moved away from the tomb entrance, rolled effortlessly by an angel, who then perched himself on top of the stone!

The angel's appearance was like lighting, the second brilliant light of that day, but still a precursor to the best light – as the Gospel of John puts it – *the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*

The Mary's meet Jesus, fall to their knees and worship him. Soon they are running to share the news, "He has risen." For days and weeks after they and the disciples would be "Basking in the Light" of their resurrected Lord.

Those who had followed Jesus began to recall what he had said before He died and began to understand the stories and the parables in, well, a whole new light!

Surely they remembered Jesus saying, "I am the Light of the World." You probably remember reading the text – but so many of Jesus' words are remembered without any context. The Marys and the Twelve would not have forgotten the context.



Jesus said, "I am the Light of the World" while he was teaching in Jerusalem. The chapter before there was intrigue with the Temple Police reporting on Jesus' whereabouts to the chief priests and Pharisees. Jesus' words, Biblical scholars believe, came at a very special moment in the life of the Jewish People. You see, for 7 days each year the Jews celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles, a national holiday commemorating the 40 years their ancestors had wandered in the wilderness before God finally brought them into the promised land.

Now there were two things about the way the Jews celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles that made it very different from all their other annual feasts.

The first was that for those 7 days the entire nation camped out. That is, every family moved outdoors into booths made of branches & leaves to remind themselves of the hardships that their ancestors had undergone while living in tents during the 40 years in the wilderness.

The second was that on the opening night of the celebration a giant Menorah with large bowls of oil was set up on the temple grounds in the Court of the Women. Then with great pomp & ceremony, the bowls of oil were set afire. And ancient accounts say that the light from this giant Menorah lit up the streets of Jerusalem.

This was to remind them that God had led their ancestors during their wanderings with a pillar of cloud by day, & a pillar of fire by night.

Jesus had gone to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. He was speaking to the people in the area of the Treasury of the Temple which was just next to the Court of the Women where the giant Menorah had been set up.

Jesus may very well have been responding to lighting of the giant Menorah. So that when suddenly the darkness of the Jerusalem evening was dispelled by the brilliant flames, and all of Jerusalem looked up, especially those listening to Jesus, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Imagine the pageantry and the timing. Jesus used what was readily available to communicate his message! "I am the Light of the World." That night his hearers "Basked in the Light."

We began the season of Lent on Ash Wednesday. As worshipers entered the Chapel, they walked past a table full of stones and an empty backpack. We put stones in the backpack, pebbles, hand-sized stones, bread loaf-sized stones. The stones represented sins, sins that we carry with us, sins that burden us, that drag us down. This image helped us understand our need for forgiveness, to let go and to let God.

Again today, we see a stone, rolled aside by God's messenger. When the stone is removed, the Light can come out of the Tomb...Forgiveness on Display, shining on us like a refreshing, warming light.

It may be that you still carry burdens, sins, things that have hurt you. Perhaps you woke this morning, like the Marys, with little hope that anything new could enliven or enlighten you.

The poet Rumi wrote, "The wound is the place where the Light enters you."

Today, know that Christ, the Light of the World, is your Healer. Be reminded every holy time you see a sunrise, or the glimmer of a candle, or even when you change a light bulb!

Today...on this day of Resurrection...take some time to Bask in the Light, to warm up to the glorious



warmth of Jesus Christ, to let the Light enter you even where you feel most vulnerable. Take time to smile – even have a hearty laugh at the cosmic joke God has played on the world. Life and light wins out over death and darkness. Into our darkness, shines the Light. All creation rejoices. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!