

“’Twas the Week After Easter”

John 20:19-31

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’Twas the week after Easter, and all through the church
All the pomp of last week seems now left in the lurch.

Easter baskets so recently filled to the brim
Sit empty, save bits of fake grass round the rim.
The bunnies are eaten, ears first and then toes
And marshmallow peeps, from the wings to the nose.

The dozens of eggs dyed bright colors with care
In hopes that egg hunting might soon fill the air
Sit cold in the back of the fridge, dark and pallid
Awaiting a fate of school lunch or egg salad.

It’s hard to believe it’s been just a few days
Since we came to this place and were awed and amazed
Yes, Easter arrived just a week ago now
With all the egg cracking that Ken would allow
and banners and colors and flowers throughout
The choir in full form, all the organ stops out.
That was *last Sunday* – if you can believe it.
‘Course, when Monday came it was hard to perceive it.
On the news, there was death and destruction galore
And we can’t seem to get through a day without war
And then Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday came round
and soon Easter felt more like a joke than profound.

But perhaps that’s the right metaphor to invoke,
An image of Easter as great cosmic joke.
After all, if you listen, and train a good ear,
There’s something out there you might just get to hear.
From somewhere above, and from somewhere beside,
The sound of deep laughter is heard to abide.
The sound is quite faint, its echo so tiny;
It’s quite hard to hear ‘neath what’s loud and what’s whiny.
It’s lost in the noise of the cars and the traffic,
But if you try hard, you might hear God laughing.

What’s more, if you listen with well-tuned-in ears,
You may just find out it’s the sound of the spheres.

The laughter 'neath all of the noise and the smoke
Is that of the One who has played the best joke.

Though we huff and we puff and we live in our sin,
We were made by a God who just will not give in.
Though we lie to our friends and we cheat on our taxes,
We justify wealth and deny others access,
We puff ourselves up and then boast quite a lot,
We act like we're king of the hill when we're not
Still, our God finds a way to make good of our slime –
And God's played the ultimate trump card this time.

When God came in Jesus to teach us to love,
To show God is *with* us, not miles up above,
We nailed him to wood and our spear pierced his side,
And then after betrayal and torture, he died.

“Now you watch and see what I will do,” our God said
And God overturned death and brought life in its stead.

It's the trick of the ages, the great cosmic joke:
No matter what happens in life to us folk,
God's love is so wide and love's height such a summit,
that even the darkness cannot overcome it.
When the weight of the world feels like one giant, “NO!”
God's laughter says, “You wanna bet? Sure, let's go.
“It's not a fair bet against me, I confess.
“Cause when death declares ‘NO!’ my new life responds, ‘YES!’”

Our God is a God of reversal, you see,
Always opening us to what newness might be.
When we think that the powers of God have been drained,
God says, “I've got more up my sleeve. Look again.”

We know it ourselves, we can see that it's true.
'Cos you've known newness in your life, haven't you?

Do you remember, that moment of light?
When dawn began breaking in blackest of night?
Perhaps it was after a time of depression,
When pain in your soul was beyond your expression.
When nothing about waking life seemed alright,
And you laid in a bed of no sleep late at night.

Or maybe it was after someone had died,
And your grief sat like cold oatmeal deep down inside.

On the outside you seemed to go on with your days,
But inside was like a deep fog or dark haze.

Or maybe you hurt for a partner now lost,
A wrenching betrayal // a divorce at great cost.
The death of a child // a huge debt to pay,
Addiction // long illness // a move far away.

“Dark night of the soul” is what this is called,
When darkness has over light taken hold.
When even the presence of loving, kind friends
Seems like it won’t make a dent in amends.
The positive outlook of those who have hope
Seems silly when you’re at the end of your rope.
“Show me!” you want to scream right in their face,
“Show me where God is in this stupid place!
“I cannot see why you hold hope in this hour,
It’s clear that God’s left us to use our own power.”

Except our own power is never enough.
We try to be strong, but the going is rough.

I think that’s how Thomas felt, how it had been.
When all the disciples that gathered had seen.
But he had seen only Christ’s death days before.
How was he ‘sposed to believe there was more?

He said, “I can’t know what you claim did appear,
Unless I see marks of the nails and the spear.
Unless I can put my own hand in his side,
I will not believe more than that Jesus has died.”

In the darkest of nights, in the coldest of days.
It is hard to believe there is more than the haze.
It is hard to believe that the dawn might yet come.
That new life will appear, that new life might become.

But remember way back to your darkest of days,
When the dawn began shining a light in your haze.
When you knew that the morning might come yet, at last.
When someday this pain would be part of your past.
Or when new life, new love, new adventures arose,
When another door opened when all had seemed closed.
Just when you thought, “No new tricks for this dog.”
A lighthouse appears in the midst of the fog.
Surprises that rise like a bulb in the spring,

That's the moment when God's doing quite a new thing.

And that newness, that glimpse of what this life might hold,
The promise of something new, shocking and bold,
Is what Thomas saw when he touched and believed,
Christ broke through his darkness; new life was conceived.

"Now you watch and see what I will do," our God said
And God overturned death and brought life in its stead.

That's what God does in our lives every day.
God gives us what we need to see hope anyway.
In the rising of Christ from a violent, cruel death,
We know that God's love is as close as our breath.
In the midst of our doubt, in the midst of our pain,
When the world says "No way!" God says "Yes!" once again.

So now can you hear it, the ripple of laughter?
The presence of God in the now and hereafter?
It's the joy of the knowledge that love conquers all,
Even death on a cross; even our sinful fall.
The laughter rides round in the spin of the earth,
The change of the seasons, the signs of rebirth.
It sings in the mountains, it moves in the seas,
Its chuckle is heard in deep roots of the trees.

Even after the Easter egg hunts are all through
And the baskets of chocolate have vanished from view
Still the laughter goes on through the turning of years.
The music of God in the movement of spheres.

You might think that that's a good place now to quit,
And I'm running out of good rhymes that will fit.
But here in this Scripture there's more to discern.
There's one other thing that from John's words we learn,
Jesus says to his friends, "Now may peace be with you."
But he also says, "As God sent me, I send you."

As we celebrate Holy Play Sunday, my friends,
It is not just James, John and Peter Christ sends.
You are now people who know the joke, too.
The story, the punch line, the laughter: it's true –
You've seen it at work in your very own lives
When into dark night of the soul light arrives.

This cosmic joke that we know to be true,
The chance to bear witness, to live what is new,
Is something that we are to share far and wide
This joke is too good to keep locked up inside.

Go tell your own tale of God's work in your life,
Tell your friends and your colleagues, your husband, your wife.
We all need to be told again and again
That God's love does triumph, and new life will reign.

In the dark night of the soul, like dear Thomas,
It's sometimes too dark to remember the promise.
That's why we must tell our own stories, dear folk,
Of God's work within us, of God's cosmic joke
That overturned death, even death of the Son,
So that we might live like the victory's won.

With joy and with laughter, let's go from this place
Not with some insincere smirk on our face,
But with peace in our hearts that has come from above,
To share the new life of the risen Christ's love.