

**Trinity UMC April 22, 2018**  
**Opening Words and Sermon**  
**'Lighten Up' by Rev. Geri Hamlen**

**Welcome and Opening Words**

*Welcome to everyone here! Thumbs up to the 22 who were here last week. Hats off to any newcomers. We're still here and it's still the Easter season for God's Easter people. You do know that God has a sense of humor, right? Why else would Easter have been on April Fool's Day a few weeks ago? And what about last week...a snow storm that started on Saturday night and gave you all a Snow day on Sunday. How many of you looked out the window, had a good laugh and then...stayed in your pajamas all day?*

Yes, God appreciates laughter. There is even such a thing as Holy Humor Sunday. Churches in 15<sup>th</sup> century Bavaria used to celebrate the Sunday after Easter as *Risus Paschalis* ('God's Joke,' or 'the Easter laugh'). Priests would deliberately include amusing stories and jokes in their sermons in an attempt to make the faithful laugh. After the service, people would gather together to play practical jokes on one another and tell funny stories. It was their way of celebrating the resurrection of Christ – the supreme joke God played on Satan by raising Jesus from the dead.

<https://re-worship.blogspot.ca/2011/03/laughter-sunday.html>

About 40 years ago, a group called the *Merry Christians*, started encouraging churches in England and America to insert a Sunday of Holy Humor into the weeks after Easter. Maybe some of you have experienced that at other churches over the years. A few jokes. Maybe some sight gags or goofy skits. Well, this a.m. we are going to include that concept into our worship time. After all, our theme for this Easter Season is 'Jesus was lifted up so we could lighten up.' So lighten up we shall! And we have been....

If you haven't been here in a while, then you missed:

1. Erica Thomas from Camp M. encouraging us to 'Be the Moon' and **lighten up the world** by reflecting the light of God's love wherever we go...just as the moon reflects the light of the sun.
2. Last week we had some experiential worship around the teachings of Jesus about **lighten up the load** of our brothers and sisters in the church by helping out. Using the gifts of the Holy Spirit to sing, to usher, to play together.
3. Now today, we are going to just plain '**Lighten up' with laughter**. Are you OK with that? Reinhold Niebuhr said: 'Humor is a prelude to faith, and laughter is the beginning of prayer.' So maybe I should tell a joke before we go into our morning prayer? This is for the Mission Trip people who are very familiar with Ole jokes and for Nathan Ruble, (Nathan gave me permission to use his name...those of you who know him will see why...

*There was the time where Ole moved up north. He discovered that he was the only Lutheran in his new little town of all Catholics. That was okay, but the neighbors had a problem with his barbecuing venison every Friday during the Lenten season, for it was torture for them. Since they couldn't eat meat on Friday, the tempting aroma was getting the best of them.*

*Hoping they could do something to stop this, the neighbors got together and went over to talk to Ole, eventually persuading him to join their church. The big day came and the priest had Ole kneel. He put his hand on Ole's head and said, "Ole, you were born a Lutheran, you were raised a Lutheran, and now," he said as he sprinkled some incense over Ole's head, "now you are a Catholic!"*

*Ole was happy and the neighbors were happy.*

*But the following Friday evening at suppertime, there was again that aroma of grilled deer steaks coming from Ole's yard. The neighbors went to talk to him about this and as they approached the fence, they heard Ole saying:*

*"You were born a whitetail, you were raised a whitetail, and now," he said as he sprinkled seasoning salt over the choice tenderloin cut, "now you are a trout!"*

*submitted by pulpitt in ND <http://javacasa.com/humor/denom.htm>*

*In that spirit of joy and laughter, let's turn to our Call to Worship. You can remain seated...*

**Sermon—'Lighten Up!'** Psalm 126, Luke 24: 36 - 45

*Let's think about it...these words: ' Joy is the most infallible sign of God's presence.' Jesus is the infallible presence of God and yet Jesus, God in human form, shows up **after being crucified dead and buried**. He shows up...and is there joy? Au contraire. He...scares the heebie jeebies out of the disciples. Shows them his hands and his feet and yet still they stood there doubting. They were not sure what to think. Bamboozled is one word for it. Sometimes the joy takes a while to develop!*

*For many of us, if we remember, if we stop and think about it...When we are joyful, happy...we can sense God's presence. And give thanks. You've probably done that at least at time or two in your life.*

*When you are filled with doubt. Or sadness. Or anger. Or sickness. Or grief. Do you still make room for God? Do you let a little bit of God's light shine in your dark place? Make room for an eensie weensie teeny tiny little bit of joy?*

*That reminds me of a joke. This is my favorite joke...I hope I haven't already told you? Bigger Family. Baby Bigger—eensie teensy tiny baby.*

*Our emotions, our problems, our difficulties seem so big sometimes. So big and so consuming that it's hard to remember that all it takes is just a little bit of joy to feel God's presence. If we could just lighten up then The Easter message would make more sense because Easter is God's way of making it so that there is no problem too big to be solved. No trouble too difficult to be fixed. No brokenness so damaging that God can not bring healing and renewal and transformation.*

*You were born a Lutheran, you were raised a white tail and now....that's what Jesus resurrection is all about...and now you are offered new life. New understandings and yes, even new challenges.*

*And humor will help get you there. At my Auntie Marcille's memorial service, I had a chance to say a few words. I wanted to give credit to Auntie for the greatest gift of her life that I could think of. I started off telling them about the time I was in my early 20's, riding a Greyhound bus around the country and stopped in Baton Rouge to see Auntie M. and Uncle David. I was on my way to the French Quarter to see what all the excitement is about down there. That was a little worrisome for my Aunt and Uncle. Young woman. Travelling alone. To sin city! (All I can say is that I wouldn't be here now if I hadn't been wild and crazy back then.)*

*They drove me to the bus station and my Aunt handed me \$100 saying, 'Promise me that when you get to the French Quarter that you will find a nice hotel. Check in. Have dinner and then when it starts to get dark...go back to your room. Lock the door and don't come out until morning!' Such a gift... Hotel Monteleone...\$100 a night. \$299 now.*

*But her greatest gift to me and all of my brothers and sisters was her sense of humor. Sometimes in our primary families...it's harder to get that 'tickle your funny bone' thing going on because families are intense. My parents had five of us and a thick, dense, complicated undertow of unresolved conflicts. You know how families are. But my Auntie Marcille and Uncle David...coming in always lit up the house with their jokes and their laughter. They took each of us seriously enough to know just where our funny bone was. We only saw them when they were on vacation and they were too funny for words with us. A hoot...and they shared that humor with us kids. And when life gets dark for me, I give thanks for Auntie M. and the comic relief she showed me.*

*Because sometimes humor is as simple as taking a closer look at something you've already seen a million times and checking to see if there's anything funny about it at all. Often there is...if you look hard enough.*

*For example...the scripture this a.m. I know. It's the Bible. It's Jesus. We're supposed to take it seriously but bear with me here for a minute...It's Holy Humor Sunday so let's look for some of the funny stuff going on here.*

*Like the thing about ghosts. But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!*

*Oooooo.*

*What like Casper the Friendly Ghost?*

*Couldn't they tell he was the Holy Ghost?*

*Were they hiding from the Roman Ghost Busters?*

*The Scripture tells us the Disciples were confused. So Jesus tries to convince them he's alive...He shows them his hands and his feet. What's more human than hands with opposing thumbs and smelly feet? **Gestures***

*And then, just to be even more human, and unghostly, Jesus plays the Hunger Games with them. Not the dystopian District Children's battle for survival game with Katniss Everdeen and Peeta...No Jesus lets his tummy rumbling convince the disciples that he's not a ghost and they fall for it....handing him a piece of broiled fish.*

*Which is really maybe the funniest thing of all...Because this is not happening out on a beach somewhere. You have to go to the Gospel of John for that story. Luke's story is in the city of Jerusalem. City food. Have you ever had broiled fish? Not baked.*

*Not fried.*

*Not dried.*

*Not blackened over a fire.*

*Almost all the translations say **broiled fish**. In water. Maybe a little wine with spices and vegetables. But broiled fish is always, always...soggy. So imagine a disciple picking up a piece of wet, goopy, flaking apart fish and putting it in Jesus' hands. I'm guessing they didn't have paper plates and plastic forks. How would you eat that? **Gesture slurping from palm of hand**. Fish flakes down the front, in his beard. How human and unghostly!*

*I don't know. You gotta wonder. If Luke was trying to be funny? Maybe it's just my weird sense of humor but there really is something very human and convincing about Jesus eating broiled fish to prove he's truly and joyfully alive. Fully human and fully divine. Our Lord and Savior.*

*I mean, think about it. Jesus could have come back from the dead...Mad. He'd been messed with big time. His friends had stood by...I'm sure he must have felt like he's been stabbed in the back but he wasn't holding on to any of that, was he? No...he was trying to joke around with the disciples with the Ghost thing and the Hunger games.*

*He was alive and patient with those who doubted. Alive and encouraging us all to lighten up. So that we can be lifted up too...above the dark and dreary stuff that goes on and on and on. Lightened up with laughter.*

*I have to believe that when Jesus was opening their (and our minds) to understand the Scriptures, he said something about letting the Scriptures be a source of humor and insight and not just read the same old stories over and over again while understanding them the same old way.*

*The miracle of Easter, celebrated year after year, in church after church, in places all over this wild and crazy world is that new words can be used to describe this old, and ever-fresh story of life and death and re-birth. Resurrection. Of Easter. And it's OK to laugh. And to find humor and joy. So how about one more joke?*

*Golf joke from JeremiahG-C.*

Moses and Jesus are in a threesome playing golf when they come to a hole with a water hazard.

Moses takes his shot and it's short. As the ball rolls toward the pond, he raises his club and the water splits as his ball rolls across to the green, where he chips it in.

Jesus takes a bigger shot. Just as his ball is about to hit the water, it stops and hovers just above the surface. He walks onto the pond and chips it onto the green.

The third guy sets down his ball. He closes his eyes, spins around three times, and takes a wild swing. It slices so hard it hits a truck on the nearby highway. It bounces off the truck onto the roof of a maintenance shed on the course. Then it rolls down the gutter directly towards the pond. As it rolls in, a frog leaps by and swallows it. At that moment, a hawk swoops down and snatches the frog. In midair, the frog screams in terror right over the hole, dropping the ball for a hole in one.

Moses turns to Jesus and says "I hate playing with your dad."

---

*That's how great God is! All of that...a truck, a roof, a frog, a hawk and how great that we are here and now, together, laughing with each other...So tell your own jokes and then we'll listen to the Choir.*