
Easter Sunday: God's Laughter

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
Atlanta, Georgia
Easter Sunday**

God wants us to get wet today.

There is no escaping it.

Even if we are all dressed up in our Easter finery, God wants us to get wet. Even if we just got our hair done for this glorious day, God wants us to get wet! This is God's way of saying, "Laugh!"

You all know the story of Mother Teresa, the beautiful saint and servant of the poor, being interviewed one day by an earnest reporter. As the interviewer was finishing up his questions to her, he wanted to ask a question meant to be practical. He asked her, "Given your ministry, what can we do to live out the good life?"

To his surprise, Mother Teresa did not say "Go, sell all you have and work with the poor, like me." Perhaps he, and we, would have expected her to say that. But, instead, she said simply and directly, "What can you do? Smile at the people you live with."

The reporter was startled, and he pressed the issue. "That's easy for you to say. You don't face family pressures, and the work place." "Oh," said Mother Teresa, "I live with Jesus. Believe me, he's a hard person to live with."

Yes, Jesus is a hard person to live with, because we will never figure him out. We build a great fire outside this morning, and God rains on it. We are all proud of ourselves one day, and Jesus humbles us. We thought we were dead one Friday, and God woke us up on Sunday.

Resurrection is the punch line of God's great joke, God's great laughter.

We are going to baptize some particular people today; but God wants to baptize all of us again today. God wants us to get wet today. God wants us to laugh.

A drunken man stumbled into a baptism service on a spring Sunday afternoon down by the river. He ambled down into the water and stood right next to the minister. The minister turned, noticed the old drunk, and said, "Mister, are you ready to find Jesus?"

The drunk looked back and said, "Yes sir, I am."

The minister then dunked the fellow under the water and pulled him right back up.

"Have you found Jesus?" the minister asked.

"No, I didn't!" said the drunk.

The minister then dunked him under for a quite a bit longer, brought him up and said, "Now brother, have you found Jesus?"

"No, I did not!" said the drunk again.

Then, rather disgusted, the Minister held the man under for at least 30 seconds, brought him up and demanded, "For the grace of God, have you found Jesus yet?!"

The old drunk wiped his eyes and pleaded, "Are you sure this is where he fell in?"

Yes, I'm sure Jesus was in that water, in that water of baptism. Jesus is in the water of baptism today. Jesus is in this spring rain.

When my wife gave me a wedding ring almost 25 years ago, she had it engraved with our favorite Bible verse at the time. It's still one of our favorites. Hosea 6.3 says,

"Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.
His going forth is as certain as the dawn.
And God shall come to us as the rain,
As the spring rain watering the earth."

God comes to us overflowing today. God wants us to smile at the people we live with. And God wants us to laugh.

Laughter means that we get it. We get it. In the midst of all the anger and pain in the world. In the midst of all sorts of reasons to mope. In the midst of so many things that look like death, there is resurrection in the world; and this resurrection goes beyond our wildest expectations. We laugh so hard that cry. We cry so hard, we have to laugh.

One of my daughters, Sarah, is in the rainy climate of England right now; but she used to be only three years old. It fell my turn, one night, to give her a bath.

That day, as I recall, had been quite a hard day in the lives of two young parents with young children, and Sarah was giving us all a time. She would scream. She would pout. She would run away. It took me 30 minutes to convince her she was going to get a bath.

Finally, we were in the bathroom. I leaned over into the bath to turn on the faucets. When I did, the water came out, not from the bath faucets but from the overhead shower faucet. My head was completely drenched with cold water, and I was so frozen and surprised that I couldn't speak.

Sarah looked at me with young and startled eyes herself. Having spent the last hour screaming, she didn't know now what to do. So she laughed. Sarah laughed. I laughed, too. It was a great joke. In that moment, we were truly reconciled. We were holy laughing.

God was baptizing me again in that moment. God wanted to get me wet, and it was hilarious.

This is what the water of baptism does. This is what rain does. Water - the universal solvent! It reconciles us in the marvelous love of God.

I realize that reconciliation does not come automatically. It takes time and struggle and pain. But it does come. Reconciliation and grace come as sure as joy comes in the morning.

It is the wildest and funniest and truest joke in the world. We thought Jesus was dead, and he is alive. We thought God was useless, but God is good. We thought life was not worth living, but life is glorious!

Easter is the kind of day when all we should do is laugh all day. We've cried too many tears. We've worried about too many minor details. Today, the world rejoices in God's great laughter.

So, let us laugh at the joke. God has reconciled the world to himself, through Jesus Christ.

Through the rain, God smiles at us today. God, too, wants to smile at the people he lives with. And God lives with us! Loneliness and sadness does not stop God. Suffering does not stop God. Even death itself, does not stop God from living with us. God smiles at us today. And God laughs with us.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

AMEN.

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