

For the people of St. Philip's  
3 Easter, Year B  
April 26, 2009  
Luke 24:36b-48  
Maria Hoecker, preacher

A few weeks ago I read about a minister who has started an annual tradition at her church. On a Sunday following Easter she tells jokes instead of giving a sermon. Doesn't that sound like a grand idea? I sat down to write a sermon this week and really, all I want to do this time of year is laugh and play and be outside of these walls in the sunshine. Deeper thoughts elude me, I want to go out and DO. As it should be. It's time to get out in the world and spread some good news. We are happy, we are in a season of giddy joy during Eastertide, the darkness of Lent and Holy Week has lifted! Alleluia.

Now I'm the worst joke teller in the world, I can never remember jokes and half the time I don't even get the punch lines. So I don't have a bunch of jokes lined up, but I do have something funny to read to you today. It's a news article that I came across this week in The Onion. If you don't know about this news organization you're missing something. When you read an Onion article, you're never really sure if they are joking or not.

Here 'tis.

God Makes Surprise Visit To Local Church  
April 21, 2009 | Issue 45•17

FAYETTEVILLE, NC—Parishioners at the First Presbyterian Church were left stunned and in awe of His glory on Sunday, when the Lord God Almighty dropped by their 11 a.m. service unannounced.

Interrupting Pastor Terry Pridgen's sermon on His unending mercy, God appeared suddenly before His flock as an intense beam of white light, instantly dispersing the earthly forms of those seated in the first two pews. Sources said the remaining congregants had to avert their eyes from their Creator, whose booming celestial voice overwhelmed their worldly senses and humbled their hearts as He politely apologized for not calling first.

"I AM the God of Abraham, the LORD MOST HIGH, who brought you forth from the bondage of Egypt," God said unto church members, many of whom cowered in reverent fear of Him. "Thought I'd just pop in and see how things were going. Please, pretend like I'm not even here."

The Supreme Being then thanked the choir for its "lovely introduction" and took a seat to the right of the altar.

According to wholly repentant witnesses, who were scarcely able to look upon the Alpha and Omega, much less conceive of the enormity of His Might, God did not speak again for the entirety of the service, but was seen nodding approvingly during the Nicene Creed.

Attendees reportedly did not ask the One Who Made Them Flesh why He had chosen to visit their small parish, though some suspected the church's new electric organ might have had something to do with it.

"I don't think anyone knew He was coming," said churchgoer Ron Stiehl, adding that, for once, he was happy his wife dragged him to church. "At least it seemed that way when He started walking toward us and everyone was yelling their heads off like it was Judgment

Day."

"Turns out the King of Kings was just making the rounds," Stiehl continued. "I thought He'd be taller."

While God did not reveal unto man a reason for His visit—nor did He, in His great wisdom, offer to pay for the six stained-glass windows that shattered from the awesome power of His presence—the Almighty sat among His followers for the last 35 minutes of the Sunday service, as well as the free coffee and pastries that followed.

Sources said that Our Father sat alone eating two cinnamon-sugar doughnuts, and was approached only once, when 5-year-old Jeremy Pacheco tried to hug the omnipotent deity. The boy's parents immediately yanked him away.

The other 112 church members avoided God entirely, and reacted to His continued stay with a mix of astonishment, confusion, fearful reverence, and the sublime inner peace that comes with the knowledge of a power greater than oneself.

"I wanted to ask the Lord what heaven is like, and if my mother is there, but I wasn't sure if it's still considered taking His name in vain when you address Him directly," Wendy Alston said. "And I didn't dare draw attention to myself with two teenagers wearing blue jeans to church. I could barely look at Him, I was so ashamed."

"Oh dear God," said 72-year-old church volunteer Michael Sharpe, completely enraptured by the materialization of the One True Creator before his very eyes. "Oh, dear God in heaven."

Since the Almighty's decision to stop by the First Presbyterian Church, the theological world has been thrown into chaos. Presbyterian leaders said God's appearance was indisputable proof that their denomination is the one true faith, but afternoon sightings of the Lord at two other Fayetteville churches, as well as one synagogue, have cast doubt on that theory.

"God said He just wanted to see what we were up to," Pastor Pridgen said. "This is His house, after all. He can drop in whenever He wants."

"Although, you'd think an all-knowing deity unbound by time and space would be able to give us some warning so we could at least put a bulletin in the church newsletter," the pastor added. "Not that I'm complaining or anything. All praise be to God. Is He still hanging around the parking lot?"

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Is he still hanging around in the parking lot?! Jesus just asked us for something to eat, is he still out there? Today we too are in the Presence of One whose vitality demands an immediate, active response.

I love the homely way Luke tells part of this story today. Luke, the physician, is all about telling the story of Jesus' human side. Jesus asks the Disciples and the women who were the working end of the band of followers, "do you have anything to eat?" That's the sort of question you ask at a friend's house. You don't do this in high society, not in the formal living room of someone you just met, but sitting in the den with a close friend you can ask, "Is there anything in the refrigerator?"

What would we do if we found God going to our refrigerator at coffee hour and asking if he

could have some of the yummy cookies that the Care Committee makes for receptions?

Jesus is among friends here. A close friend doesn't hesitate to ask for what is needed. Close friends know without really thinking about it that they can ask for even a hard favor because they would do anything for us. Implicit in every request is the history of all that shared friendship.

Jesus, the One who stretched two loaves and five little fish across a table set for 5000 doesn't hesitate to say, "is there any fish left over?" What a wonderful celebration of the body this is – that the risen Christ still gets hungry and enjoys a good piece of fish.

The Good News this morning isn't that God has decided to make a surprise visit, sitting with us and scaring us to death. The Good News is that Jesus is here, bidding us peace, and asking for something to eat. Jesus was crucified, we can see the wounds are still there, yet he is Risen. He's not just some spirit ghost, he died, and then he came back resurrected~body and soul. He's real and he's hungry. God knew we couldn't handle seeing God, so God acted decisively in history by raising Christ from the dead, thereby doing something radically new in history.

Jesus gives us a new image of God. God isn't scary guy anymore. God is without gender and agenda. God is not just a bigger, better king up in the sky who will one day wipe out all the bad guys. That is old news, not good news. The good news is that God is love; powerful vulnerable love; undying love. This is what has always been true about God, but when God appears we just can't see it.

That's where Jesus comes in, saying "Peace be with you," let's eat.