

Sermon for April 1, 2018 (EasterB) “What A Fool”
(Based on Acts 10:34-43 and John 20:1-18[a])

We thought we knew what we were doing. I mean, we'd been at this a while. When your ancestors have been fleeing persecution for two thousand years, trying to fly under the radar of each successive oppressor, retelling the Passover story of Divine Love and Liberation while we hide in locked rooms, things can get a bit confusing. But we thought, by now, surely we knew—how to survive, how to carry on, how to live and let live, or—at least—how not to get completely wiped out.

Some of us tried to pass on this time-tested wisdom of survival. We told Jesus—and his wild cousin John—not to shout so loud. When the soldiers are patrolling the riverbank, it's frankly stupid to call in the crowds, baptising and telling them to “turn their lives around.” When the emperor's in town, it just doesn't make sense to yell, “Jewish Lives Matter.” When you're standing near the religious authorities, it's foolish to call out, “Women's lives matter!” or, “Unclean lives matter!” You might as well say, “Canaanite Lives,” or “Possessed Lives.” Rule number one of survival in an empire: don't call attention to suffering: your own, or anyone else's.

We tried to reason with him: you're embarrassing your relatives. And Jesus said, “whoever follows God is my relative.” What a fool.

We tried to protect his reputation, and he practically ran to the red-light district. We found him at the local watering hole, talking theology with a woman of ill repute.

We tried to put a little by for future needs, and he heaped praise on the most wasteful, extravagant displays—like that woman who busted open a stone jar of the best perfume to anoint him. We never did get the smell out of that place.

We tried to put him on a pedestal, and he smiled, took off his shirt, got on his knees, and washed our feet.

We tried to get him to practice restraint, and he kept unleashing heaven all over the place. We tried to save him for the future...and he insisted on saving *us, now*.

We did everything, within reason, to keep ourselves alive and keep him from getting caught. What a fool.

And what has become of our reason? Didn't you all try to fit in, too? Didn't you think, at

the start, that if you worked hard and kept your head down, you could avoid all this pain? Did you think you could get by without anyone's help? Did you think the solution was to work harder, drive faster? It's okay-- it's all within reason!

But reason hasn't solved anything. It's the worst kind of joke. All this striving! All this hard work! And you and I have grown weaker, and sadder, more exhausted, more addicted. And we are sucking the planet dry, filling the air with things we can't breathe, filling the oceans with monstrous mats and microscopic shattered bits of plastic until the whales and seabirds and fish wash up dead by the thousands to rot on our oil-soaked beaches. And the hate of human for human grows, until we turn a blind eye to women and children in Maine who suffer and die at the hands of their partners and caregivers, until we crucify young black and brown men—Tamir, Trayvon, Walter, Philando, Samuel, Freddie, Terrence, so many others, and now, Stephon—on the carefully-manufactured cross of our own ignorance and fear, until a Jewish congregation of Holocaust survivors finds their janitor of 30 years grabbed and deported in the middle of the night, dropped off in Mexico without a phone, money, or identification papers, because this is what we have come to accept as *reasonable*. Reason has taught us to keep quiet and blend in with the crowd, even when it becomes a murderous mob. Reason has taught us to keep our tools sharp, even as we use them to dig our own graves.

If everything was left up to reason, Jesus would still be dead. Hold on, Beloved People of God—hear this Good News: *God loves us beyond reason*. No cross we can build can stop that love. No grave we can dig will ever contain that love. Because God loved us enough to endure all our careful rules, all our human attempts at saving ourselves through hard work and cleverness and reason. The one who breathed life into earth, who blessed Eden and filled our world with wild winds and rainbows, that Divine Lover of All Creation keeps healing, and inspiring, helping prophets find their voices, scattering dandelions so they can lodge in the cracks and grow through asphalt and concrete. That Spirit of Love keeps giving mothers the strength to push children into the world, keeps giving fathers the gentle courage to hold those children and seek their safety. And that Love opens its arms to welcome every person on the threshold of death, as they're gathered into God's wonderful embrace.

If you travel across the ocean, and walk up to the gates of the great Medieval cathedrals,

you will see massive and complex works of art, in iron and stone, images of Jesus getting busy between his death and resurrection. The scenes depict “the Harrowing of Hell.” The tradition is that Jesus saw death as a chance to go a little crazy with his “get of of jail free” card—he went down, brought the Word of God, popped the lock off the gates, and scooped up everybody who suffered there, from Adam and Eve onward, ushered them out and sent them off to God's house, where there was a place for every one of them. No tests, no finger-wagging, no picking and choosing, just a free-for-all liberation of all the suffering souls.

The Harrowing of Hell-- Every person who passed by or entered any of those old churches came face to face with this wild idea that Jesus wants freedom for everyone, no questions asked. The Harrowing of Hell—what was it like? If Jesus set out to cause trouble and disruption there, if he went to give Hell to Hell, doesn't that mean he actually gave them Heaven?

Welcome, then—not just to a day of Resurrection, but a season, a lifetime, a neverending story of Love Beyond Reason. What a fool this Jesus is! Humble, embodied, with a wisdom that confounded the authorities and left us all scratching our heads. What a fool, destroyed by all our human failings, risen again by God's ridiculous grace, to laugh in the face of death. Of course we're not worthy. Of course he loves us anyway. We're all fools, for Christ's sake! Now go out into all the world—and give 'em Heaven!

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