

I don't think I told you this portion of my story, but Bev never agreed to go on a date with me until—believe it or not—I gave her a bottle of tonic water. It was then that I just schwepped her off her feet!

I think you would agree with me that there are a variety of styles of humor. That kind, which results in deep and profound belly laughter. And then there is the kind that is much more subtle, the kind that makes you smile because you've just seen yourself or somebody else or humans in general. You experience that kind of humor, and you say: "Isn't that just like us Lutherans? Isn't that just like human beings?"

That's the kind of humor I confront in the gospel reading for today. The disciples have just experienced the most remarkable, life changing, world-altering reality—the resurrection of Jesus—and they respond by locking themselves up behind closed doors. Now I must admit, their fear is probably warranted. Their leader had just been killed, crucified. The Romans and the Jewish leaders were responsible. John tells us that "for fear of the Jews," the disciples have placed themselves behind locked doors. Personally, I think *Judeans* is a better translation than Jews. The disciples weren't afraid of *all* the Jews; they were afraid of the big-wig Jewish leaders—the Judeans, the Jerusalem hot shots. They posed the big threat. They caused the disciples to lock themselves up behind closed doors. Isn't it just like human beings to deal with their fears and anxieties by hiding? Nobody's going to get at us, if we lock the doors, right?

Maybe nobody but Jesus. That is what is funny to me about this story. The disciples lock themselves up, but Jesus just shows up, nonetheless. This Jesus guy is alive. You can't keep him out. You try your best. You lock the doors. You run away. You stay away. But Jesus shows up anyway.

"Peace be with you!" he says. Oh come on! I would rather just stay in my fears and anxieties. They are familiar. And here, Jesus, you come bringing peace! And then you send me on my way. Can't you just let me stay behind locked doors? No, you've got to breathe on me with your holy breath. You send me like *you* were sent. And of all things, you send me with

the message of forgiveness. What a joke! We who have been done unto, now are being sent to be proclaimers of forgiveness. What great irony! And again, irony is not the kind of reality that makes you laugh deeply, but it does make you smile at just the way life, or may I say, just the way God is. We're living in fear and anxiety, and then God kicks us out of the nest with a big job to do. Who would have thunk?

But this is what happens when Jesus is raised from the dead. This is what happens when life, not death, reigns. The resurrection of Jesus is not so much about going to heaven when you die. The resurrection of Jesus is about living within the power of resurrected life right now. Those for whom life, not death, reigns, are those who are haunted by the life-giving call of forgiveness, a call which breathes new life into old, worn-out situations and lives.

There is nothing deadlier, nothing sadder than hard heartedness, unresolved anger. You will note that people who are consumed by anger and a desire for revenge seldom laugh at life or themselves. Life is too serious for that. Life is about getting even. Life is about winning and achieving. Life is about keeping score. The resurrection is about new possibilities, the freedom to laugh, the freedom to transform the way we live in community.

Note Luke's description of the early church. They weren't a group of grumpy curmudgeons waiting to fly off to heaven when they die. No, Luke says, "the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power, the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them."

The character of the communal life of the early church was transformed by the power of the resurrection. Their everyday life looked different. Life wasn't about getting more and buying more. Life was about sharing. Life was about the freedom of generosity—generosity whose primary goal was to make sure that there was no needy one among them.

Again, I find this reading to be a bit humorous. You expect us to believe that people can really share their stuff, that they didn't define their lives on the basis of how much they owned?

I remember when I was in seminary and Bev and I were heading off to internship here at First. We had an apartment that we were coming back to at the seminary a year later when internship was over. We needed to decide what to do with this ugly old couch that my parents had gifted us when we got married, after it had been in their living room for twenty years. It was gawdy looking and its legs were starting to get wobbly. Another couple was going to be moving into our apartment for the year, coming with almost no furniture. They could use the ugly old couch. Well, we said, if they use it, they might ruin it. You know how people are. They often don't take care of other people's things. And what would we, who had very little money, do when we came back to the seminary? So, we contemplated putting the gawdy, ugly, rickety couch in a storage space for a year. That would protect our sacred little couch.

Really? Something finally got ahold of us, and we decided we'd leave the couch for the next couple. We'd take the chance of what they might do to it. Now, this is no great example of generosity, I realize. In some ways, it is a pathetic example. But when the resurrection of Christ is trusted to be real, then tight fistedness, stinginess makes no sense. When death controls everything, you need to make sure you protect everything: your money, your stuff, yourself. Loan people your tools? Give an over-the-top tip to the waiter or the waitress? Share your stimulus money with charitable groups or the church or people in need? Freely give of your time or your heart to other people? Open your church doors to all kinds of people?

I don't know about any of that. You might get burned. They might use you. They might not return your ugly couch in usable shape. You're right! But if life, not death, reigns, then generosity is what characterizes how you and we do business. Generosity is a clear sign of individuals and communities that trust the power of the resurrection. If Jesus is alive (and that is our proclamation), then generosity is alive.

And I've got to tell you, there is such freedom in generosity. Generous people tend to be less crabby, less rigid, less angry. They laugh more. If life is not about keeping score, if life is not about getting even, if life is not about being right, if life is not about protecting yourself, you are so much freer to enjoy it, to laugh at yourself and other people.

Death drives us into our little locked rooms. Death wants us to hold on tightly to our grudges, our hatred, our grievances, every last penny that we have, every prized and even unprized possession that is ours. The resurrected life in Christ opens our tight fists, our hard hearts, our closed minds and wallets. To be alive in Christ is to be generous, to be welcoming, to be light-hearted, to laugh with great abandon.

Two men were marooned on an island. One man paced back and forth worried and scared while the other man sat back and was sunning himself. The first man said to the second man, "Aren't you afraid we are about to die?" "No," said the second man, "I make \$20,000 a week and give ten percent of my income to the church every week. It's stewardship month at my church. My pastor will find me."

I can't guarantee that. But this I can guarantee. Resurrected life is life that will bring you true joy!