"The Freedom of Resurrection Faith"
John 20:19–31

Holy Humor Sunday

This is *Holy Humor Sunday*, so a little laughter wouldn't hurt.

A minister parked his car in a no-parking zone in a large city because he couldn't find a metered space and was running out of time. He left a note under the windshield wiper that read, "I've circled the block 10 times. If I don't park here, I'll miss my appointment. Forgive us our trespasses."

When he returned, he found a citation along with a note from a police officer that said, "I've been circling this block for 10 years. If I don't give you a ticket, I'll lose my job. Lead us not into temptation."

This kind of light-heartedness reminds us that the early church used the Sundays after Easter as a time of joy and laughter—a way of celebrating the absurd reversal of death through the resurrection. And so today, I hope we continue to experience that joy—the kind that frees us from fear, doubt, and isolation.

Locked in Fear and Doubt

Theologian Erich Sauer once said, "Easter means that the resurrection of Jesus becomes the resurrection of everyone who believes in him. We live between two Easters—the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection still to come. And we are people running toward our own resurrection, strengthened by faith."

Isn't that a beautiful image? *"We are people running toward our resurrection."* Easter isn't just about something that happened 2,000 years ago. It's about how we live now. It's about trusting that death doesn't have the final word. Because Jesus lives, we can live—freely, courageously, hopefully.

But that kind of life isn't always easy. In today's passage, Jesus has already risen. But where are the disciples? Still locked behind closed doors. Still frozen in fear. Even after Mary Magdalene says, *"I've seen the Lord,"* they're too afraid to believe. And to be honest, I understand how they felt.

Modern Fear and Isolation

Even today, many immigrants live with that same kind of fear. We know what it's like to keep our heads down. To be cautious. To stay silent—not because we have nothing to say, but because it doesn't always feel safe to speak.

A pastor—who became a U.S. citizen over 40 years ago—shared a reflection that stayed with me. He had joined a peaceful protest against the bombing in Gaza. While there, he took a few photos. Nothing dramatic—just a gesture of solidarity. But later, he heard that Homeland Security had been searching travelers' phones at the border. Suddenly, he felt anxious. *"What if they find these photos? Will they question me? Should I delete them?"* He thought about it… but in the end, he left them.

He had just heard about a student at Columbia University—a permanent resident—who had joined a protest and now faced possible deportation. And then he wrote these words: "If I—someone who's been a citizen for decades, someone who's a pastor—still feel tempted to erase a photo out of fear... what must others be going through?"

Even those with citizenship and stability are anxious. So what about those without papers? Those with no guarantee of due process? Those targeted because of where they come from, or even what tattoos they have? No wonder many live in quiet fear. No wonder people second-guess themselves before they even speak.

I've felt it too. Just a month ago, I joined a rally to support Rasha Alawieh, a kidney doctor from Brown University who had been deported under an anti-immigrant policy. As the day approached, I found myself getting nervous. I even Googled, *"Is it okay for me to attend a protest?"* I told a few church members I was going with that I felt uneasy. One of them—Carl Jr.—smiled and said, "If someone tries to take your picture, just stand behind me." That small gesture meant so much. Because fear is real—but so is courage and the power of solidarity. And we don't face these things alone.

The Politics of Fear

But fear doesn't just come from outside. Sometimes we create it ourselves. We close the doors. We build the walls. We shut others out—and in doing so, we trap ourselves inside. Right now, American politics is steeped in what many call the *"politics of fear."* Political leaders tap into people's anxieties—real or imagined—to shape behavior, to consolidate power, and to justify harmful policies.

We hear of a "border crisis," or a threat from dangerous illegal immigrants, or the danger of global trade. And what do we do? We shut the borders. We deport people who seem unfamiliar. We cut off ties with the world.

But when fear replaces peace… when hatred replaces love… when revenge replaces forgiveness… That's not just bad politics. That's spiritual death. That's when we know—we've turned the world into a tomb. And that's exactly when we need the risen Christ the most.

The Risen Christ Comes to Us

Good news is that Jesus comes to us right where we are— not when we're brave, but when we're hiding. Not when we're full of faith, but when we're full of fear. He comes to the disciples in that locked room and says, "Peace be with you." He doesn't scold them. He doesn't shame them. He breathes peace into their fear, and forgiveness into their shame.

He even comes to Thomas—the one who couldn't believe unless he saw for himself. And Jesus shows him his wounds. He gives Thomas what he needs to believe. He turns a doubter into a witness. That's what the risen Christ does. He meets us in our fear and sets us free.

And we see what that freedom looks like in Acts chapter 5. The same disciples—once locked in fear—are now standing boldly before the Sanhedrin. They've been ordered to stop preaching in Jesus' name. But Peter and the others say: "The Jesus you crucified—God has raised him. God has made him our Savior." That's resurrection freedom. It turns fear into courage. Doubt into conviction. Silence into witness.

And here's the best part: We don't have to go out and find that freedom. Jesus comes to us. Jesus finds us. Jesus sets us free.

Bishop William Willimon once told a story that captures this beautifully. He was visiting a man who had received a terminal diagnosis. At one point, Willimon gently asked, "Are you afraid?" The man said, "Afraid? No. I believe in Jesus." Willimon replied with something pastoral: "Yes, we can face the future because we know we're in God's hands."

But the man shook his head and said, "No—it's not the future that gives me peace. It's my past. I've made so many mistakes. There were times I wandered far from Jesus.

Times I lived selfishly. Times I fell away from faith. But every time—every single time—Jesus came to find me. Even when I wasn't looking for him, he was looking for me. He showed up. He reached out. He held onto me. So I'm not afraid of death. Because the Jesus who found me then… I know he'll come for me again. That's the kind of love that doesn't stop. Not even at the grave."

The Tomb Is Not the End

That's what we believe. Jesus, once laid in the tomb, rolled the stone away—not just for himself, but for us. The empty tomb means our story isn't over. As Frederick Buechner said, "Resurrection means that the worst thing is never the last thing." Whatever "tomb" you're living in right now—whatever fear, pain, or regret—you are not stuck there forever.

Because Christ is risen, we don't give up. We keep hoping. We keep moving toward new life. Even if it's one small, faithful step at a time. We are people who believe Jesus is alive—right here, right now. So let's not let fear or despair have the final word. Let's not let the politics of fear steal our joy. Instead, let's trust in the One who breaks open graves and opens locked hearts.

Let's live as resurrection people. Let's walk in the freedom Christ gives. And let our lives be a witness— a living testimony that love is stronger than hate, hope is stronger than fear, and life is stronger than death.

Christ is risen. Christ is with us. And because of that, we are free. And maybe that's the holy humor in all of this: That death thought it had the last word— But God got the punchline. Amen.