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I received a strange postcard in the mail this week from a local church. On the front it had a manger scene with a bright star in the sky, inviting me to a Christmas service on April 1. I laughingly said to myself, “Someone put the wrong graphic on the postcard. How embarrassing.” I flipped it over to see which church had made the error, and it read, “April Fools’. Join us for Easter.”

As I thought back on all the Easter Sunday services I’ve done, I don’t recall any falling on April 1. I discovered that the last time Easter and April Fools’ Day coincided occurred before I was even born. The two days joined together 62 years ago in 1956. That explains why I don’t remember.

Some began planning for this rare day, dreaming up all sorts of creative pranks to do on Easter April Fools’ Day. One list of ideas suggested:



• The easiest trick is to not boil the egg [for an Easter egg hunt]. But the yoke might be on you when you have to clean up the mess.



• Unwrap tiny chocolate eggs and put the foil [from the eggs] on grapes.

• Ever notice that Brussels sprouts are a similar size to...doughnut holes? Try dipping the green vegetable into chocolate and passing it as a dessert.



• Put jelly beans in the toilet and say they were left by the Easter Bunny.¹



It’s unclear when the tradition of April Fools’ Day started, but one legend says it began in the 1500s when switching to the current Gregorian calendar, which has New Year’s Day on January 1. In the previous Julian calendar, the New Year was celebrated on April 1. Those who could be tricked into celebrating New Year’s on April 1 by those who showed up to their homes for a party got the nickname of April Fools’.²



April Fools’ Day was not a tradition during Jesus’ day, but if it had been, I can almost hear several people using the phrase on that first Easter morning. When Mary Magdalene showed up at the tomb, she found the stone that covered the entrance had been rolled away.



When she ran to tell Peter and another disciple that

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the tomb was empty, I imagine those who heard the news thought Mary was fooling as she exclaimed, “They have taken Jesus out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have taken him.” The disciples were so flabbergasted by her words that they ran to the tomb, and when they arrived they saw the linen burial clothes in the tomb, but no Jesus.

If the tradition of pulling pranks on a day in spring had existed back then, they may have wondered if someone would jump out and say, “April Fools,” but of course, no such thing occurred. It was not a joke. Jesus was missing. And they had no idea where he had been taken.



Mary decided to investigate a bit further, so she looked inside the tomb, tears streaming down her face. Imagine her surprise when she encountered two angelic beings inside who asked her, “Why are you crying?”

“They’ve taken Jesus’ body, and I don’t know where they have put him.”

Another person, who she thought was the gardener, asked, “Why are you crying. Who are you looking for?”

By this time, I imagine Mary was getting frustrated, telling the story once again that someone had removed Jesus’ body from the tomb. When the mysterious person said her name in a comforting tone, she suddenly realized she was talking to Jesus!

Have you ever had that happen? You know someone in a certain context, such as someone at work, but when you see her in another setting, such as at a restaurant, you just can’t recall how you know the person. The setting is different, so your mind can’t connect the dots and identify the person.

Mary’s eyes were blurry, full of tears, searching for a dead body. How could she ever anticipate talking with one who had died on a cross? But she suddenly faced the fact that Jesus stood before her, offering her comfort, but he warned her not to hold onto him.

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That would be difficult to not do, wouldn't it, to not hold onto Jesus? To not hold onto the one we love? Sometimes it's so difficult to let go of those we love. When death approaches, we have so many life support machines to keep them alive longer: ventilators for breathing, feeding tubes for nourishment, and many other modern equipment. I've been with countless families who struggle with whether to use or remove life support. Years ago, while serving as a chaplain in a hospital, a patient made the decision to end his own life support, for he knew that he would never have the quality of life he had before. The family, however, could not let go, and they argued with the patient, pleading with him to change his mind. When the family called for me as the chaplain, they explained their frustration with their loved one's decision and wanted me to change his mind. After listening to the patient, I understood why he was ready to let go and be with God.



When I met with the family again, they expressed their deepest fear: "If we remove life support, are we guilty of killing him?"

I replied, "You're not killing him. You're letting life take its natural course. Just because we have the technology to sustain life unnaturally doesn't mean we have to use it. Death is part of life, and something mysterious exists beyond this life. He's ready to find out what lies beyond."

They made the decision to let go. Tears filled their eyes as they said goodbye, but they realized he would not be alone in the journey.



When we find ourselves in despair, unable to let go, longing for hope in the midst of a difficult situation, we may feel as though we're in a tomb, a hole in the ground. We may feel unable to find our way out, wondering where to turn. The Easter story gives us hope, reminds us that something else exists, as one five-year-old girl learned in Sunday school.

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When she returned from Sunday school class, her mother asked what she had learned from the Easter Sunday lesson. The daughter excitedly retold the whole story. She told of the death of Jesus and how he was buried in a tomb. Later an angel came and looked in the tomb and asked Jesus what he wanted. “I want out of this hole,” Jesus said.³



We hope for new life and resurrection after we die, but it’s actually something that occurs in life right now. When a drug addict finds a way to escape the trap of addiction, she has found new life. Resurrection.

When a marriage ends in a painful divorce, it may feel like the end of the world. When another person walks in your life, new life occurs. Resurrection.

When someone suddenly loses a job, it may feel as though death has occurred. Upon finding a new job better than the one before, new life occurs. Resurrection.

When Mary discovered the new life of Jesus, she was tempted to hold on, to remain there, but Jesus told her to instead go and tell all his disciples that he would be with God.

Just imagine what happened when she did tell others. “Are you trying to fool us, Mary? Come on, you found Jesus body and talked to him? You’ve got to be kidding!”



“No fooling,” Mary might have replied. “I’m not joking around.”

That’s the same message for us today. Jesus is alive. We’re not alone. Christ is among us. Offer hope to those around you. Life has meaning. New life is possible. No fooling.

¹ Kelly Tyko, “Be careful before biting into Easter eggs Sunday! It’s also April Fools”, Day, www.tcpalm.com/story/money/business/bargainista/2018/03/27/easter-sunday-april-fools-day/461010002/

² www.snopes.com/fact-check/april-fools39-day-origins/

³ Hodgin, Michael; Hodgin, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 4476-4478). Zondervan. Kindle Edition. (adapted) #798