



**Sermon preached by The Reverend Philippa White on 3 April 2016**

How many Anglicans does it take to change a light-bulb? – Change?!

I don't usually start with a joke. But it seemed appropriate today; today, according to a fifteenth-century German tradition, is the Sunday of Laughter – the Sunday of God's Joke – the Easter Laugh.

I wonder what that makes you think of? What does it mean to see Easter as God's joke?

Now, this is using the word "joke" in a slightly specialised way. I absolutely don't mean something that's silly, or light-hearted, or not to be taken seriously. Of course Easter is to be taken seriously! But when I call Easter God's joke, I'm using the idea that humour defies the rational. Jokes are completely outside the normal day-to-day patterns of human life – and maybe that can tell us something about Easter.

Jokes defy the rational; jokes play with our expectations and do something we don't expect. The point of humour is that it turns what we expect upside down. If you can predict the punch-line, it's not funny.

And the resurrection is the ultimate unpredictable punchline.

The disciples at the beginning of today's Gospel – Thomas in the middle of it – locking their doors, fearing the religious authorities, stating that without proof they will not believe – they're living in the normal world. The rational world. Their attitude makes sense – we would probably do exactly the same.

But then comes resurrection.

The triumph of God over the rational. God's cosmic joke. God's turning upside down and inside out of all the things we thought were important, the things we thought were scary, the things we thought mattered.

None of them matter. Nothing is scary – nothing except God is worth anything; worth being scared of; worth caring about in the light of the resurrection.

God's joke shows us – as the best humour can – that the world isn't actually the way we thought it was. The resurrection as God's joke calls us to enter into God's reality.

Because the resurrection shows us that God sides with the oppressed – with those who have no chance to argue their corner, who are dismissed as unimportant, worthless, feckless.

The resurrection shows us that God's purpose in the world is reversal – reversal of social structures that are sinful and cause sin, pain, violence and fear. And the resurrection calls us to become involved in that reversal.

The disciples were hiding: locked in a room, afraid of what the religious authorities would do to them. They didn't believe in the resurrection – even though Mary had been to tell them that she had seen the Lord. They were still in the darkness of Holy Saturday, still unbelieving, still afraid...

... but when Jesus appears, Resurrection perspective floods in. Jesus appears and they are drawn into the light of Easter, God's new perspective on the whole of human life, where even death itself becomes laughable – and suddenly they are not afraid. Jesus appears into fear and failure to bring peace and forgiveness, a little resurrection for each of the disciples, a calling out of their tombs into the perspective of God's joke. Empowered by the Spirit and laughing at the way the world had got its priorities and its fears so wrong. Resurrection puts everything in a new perspective.

And in Acts we see how much courage this gives Peter and the apostles. They are living in the resurrection perspective – they have just been set free from prison by an angel, resurrection in action! – and so the Jewish authorities, the Sanhedrin and the high priest are no longer scary. They have just the same power that led the disciples to lock themselves away in hiding – but that doesn't matter any more. From the perspective of God's joke, they are worthless.

But in the world, these authorities still have power. And so God's resurrection people are called, not to ignore them, but to stand up to them. God is on the side of the oppressed: the crucified, the persecuted, the forgotten. God's resurrection perspective turns the world upside down and tells us that it is these people – the people whom the world dismisses as worthless – who are actually worth something. These are the people – oppressed, forgotten, crucified, murdered – whom God calls into resurrection – into reversal – into the new perspective. But that new perspective, that new resurrection life, comes with a calling and a risk.

Resurrection is reversal: restoring the murdered to life and exalting the oppressed; and God's resurrection people are called to be agents of that reversal. To start turning the world upside down.

And we are called to be resurrection people. We are called into that resurrection perspective. We are called to look at the world from God's point of view: where the people who are valuable are those who have nothing. Refugees and asylum seekers. Those who are homeless, unemployed, disabled. Those who are victimised by governments, by religious leaders, by communities. People whose skin colour, whose gender, whose religion, whose ethnic origin, whose gender identity and sexuality are disapproved of and dismissed. We are called to be Resurrection people in a world where refugees running from a war they had no part in starting are kept at borders, in tents, refused entry to places of safety. In a world where black teenagers in America are shot and killed by police on the flimsiest pretexts.

In a world where asylum seekers are deported daily back to countries where their lives are in danger, and which they have risked everything to leave. Where the state refuses financial support to people who are sick, disabled and dying. Where people who are unemployed have to choose between attending their parent's funeral and receiving this month's unemployment benefit.

This is a world of injustice: not just unjust people, but unjust societies. Oppressive social structures. Selfishness built into the way the world works. But we are not to despair. Resurrection means that God is already reversing this; God promises to reverse it; and God calls us to be resurrection people, agents of reversal. We are called, and empowered by the Spirit, to bring resurrection into this unjust world. To oppose these worldly structures that enforce oppression. To risk social disapproval, perhaps even persecution by governments – for the sake of bringing resurrection into all human lives.

This is God's reversal. The joke of Easter tells us that we have been looking at this all wrong. The people who actually matter – the things that actually matter – are not what the world values.

Will we follow God into the resurrection perspective? Will we live and work as resurrection people, as agents of reversal? Will we run the risk of disapproval as we oppose injustice, selfishness and greed?

For that is what we are called to do in the new perspective of Easter. Not just to rejoice in our own resurrection life, but to bring the resurrection into the life of this broken and unjust world.