

God is Missing

As you may know, I like to have a joke in my sermons from time to time. I recently found out that today on Easter Sunday, it is even more appropriate. It is actually a long standing tradition in some Eastern Orthodox churches for the priests to come prepared with a joke on Easter Sunday. This is not just to please the crowd, until we all meet again next year. It has theological significance; for on the first Easter morning nearly 2000 years ago, to everyone's surprise, it was God who had the last laugh, not the power hungry politicians or know it all religious leaders and certainly not the evil one. It is God who has the last word, and as with any joke, the end does not turn out as we'd expect.

So let's do the joke. A couple has two mischievous little boys, ages 8 and 10. At their wits' end, the parents contact a clergyman who had successfully disciplined children in the past. The parents sent the eight-year-old to meet with him first. The clergyman sits the boy down and asks him sternly, "Do you know where God is, my son?" The boy makes no response, so the clergyman repeats the question in a sterner tone, "I said, where is God?" The boy is again too shocked to give answer, so the clergyman raises his voice even more, shakes his finger in his face, "WHERE IS GOD?" At that, the boy bolts from the room, runs home, and says to his brother; "We are in big trouble this time. God is missing, and they think we did it!"

God is missing and they think we did it. Jesus' disciples probably would not have found this funny, because it hit too close to home. They were surely terrified when news of the empty tomb reached them on Sunday morning; 'Jesus is missing and they'll think we did it.' After all, what else would the skeptical authorities think when they heard that Jesus' body was missing? In fact, in the Gospel of Matthew, that is just the story the Pharisees concoct to try and pin Jesus' disappearance on his followers. Matthew reports that they paid soldiers and others to lie and say that Jesus' disciples made off with his body. So Jesus gone missing would be no joke to his disciples, it would just compound the terror they had felt for days. The terror which led chief disciple Peter to deny ever knowing Jesus three times. The terror which kept all his disciples, excepting a few women, from even going near the cross or tomb. The terror which kept anyone at all from speaking about Jesus after his death. This man who worked miracles and healed 1000s, who loved others like no other, had no funeral and no eulogy, because to do so would come with the price of death.

In three days, however, some of his female followers would strike up the courage to look for Jesus and prepare his body for burial. When they arrived to the tomb, he was missing; but gradually their fear turned to courage, hope and action. As they shared the news with the disciples, their hearts changed. 'Jesus is missing, and they'll think we did it' became 'Jesus is missing and we'd better do something about it.' We better keep looking for him, he may still be around somewhere. We better stick together, and share notes about what Jesus said would happen after his death. We better find a way, even at risk of our own lives, to share the good news of our Jesus, who died, but appears to have risen again.

Not all that much has changed since that day; the story of Jesus' followers then is the story of us followers now. God is missing today, and we better do something about it. God may be missing for us personally. If we still can't see him, we better keep looking for him in our bibles, in this church, or in another church; finding out why so many have said talking Jesus has changed their lives forever. God certainly seems missing in our society; in its violence, injustice and immorality. For those of us who are committed to Jesus, we must strive to make him known not just by our words but how we live our lives; so that when people see us, they see him. God is missing among so many of our family and friends. If we have found Jesus and are trying to follow him, we must share with anyone who will listen what he has done for us.

God is missing, Jesus is missing and this just might be the greatest part of his Easter plan. Perhaps Jesus has gone missing, so that we will continue to take the initiative to seek him and find him. Perhaps Jesus is missing, because after teaching us how life is to be lived, he wants us to take his place. Perhaps Jesus was missing from his own funeral, along with all his friends, because we are supposed to eulogize the greatest, most beautiful person who ever lived.

As we sit here now on Easter Sunday pondering Jesus' empty tomb, now is the time for us, like his disciples, to allow our fear, guilt and skepticism, to turn to courage, hope and love. Jesus is missing, but we are not in trouble. The ending is unexpected, but the joke is not meant to be on us. So let's get on our way to seek him, find him and share him with

others. Let's imitate a life that never repaid evil with evil but destroyed evil with love. Let's show our friends and neighbors, the whole world, that the death of Jesus Christ has over and over again brought new life to our people and all who believe in Him; now and always and unto the ages of ages, amen.

Kristos Hareav I merelots. Orheal e harutyunn Kristosi. Christ is Risen from the Dead. Blessed is the resurrection of Christ!