

Today is not only Easter Sunday. It's also April Fool's Day. And it's hard to imagine anything more foolish than this *{{a plastic rooster toy}}*.

If you don't recognize this particular rooster, he is Heihei from the 2016 Disney animated movie, *Moana*.

Heihei is not just foolish. He is arguably the stupidest character in the history of Walt Disney animation. He makes Goofy and Dopey look like Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking.

When I first saw *Moana*, I was extremely impressed with the movie—I would argue it's the best Disney movie of the 21st Century. I preached fairly extensively about *Moana* this past November 5—if you're interested, you can check out that sermon on our website. But as much as I loved *Moana*, I found Heihei extremely annoying. Especially when he would let out these blood-curdling screams.

Knowing how much I disliked Heihei, my otherwise wonderful daughter-in-law gave me this Heihei as a Christmas present. And the official Disney tag on this toy says it all: "Heihei is one dumb rooster—the village idiot in fact."

However, after watching *Moana* several more times, my opinion of Heihei is beginning to shift. Yes, he is stupid. Yes, he is annoying. But I think there's more to Heihei.

In fact, the tag continues, "When the clueless chicken accidentally stows away on Moana's canoe, he lands a front row seat for her epic journey."

It turns out, that Heihei somehow manages to be in the right place at the right time during pivotal moments in Moana's quest.

In fact, the more I watch the movie, the more important Heihei seems. His actions at key times actually are the only thing that allow Moana to fulfill her destiny. Heihei appears stupid. But I think there may be more to Heihei than meets the eye. Maybe there is something deeper hidden behind Heihei's foolishness.

So here we are. Easter Sunday, and April Fool's Day. Easter hasn't fallen on April 1 since 1945. So unless you're more than 73 years old, this is the first time it's happened in your lifetime. And yet, this conjunction of Easter and April Fool's Day offers an important reminder to us.

Because in the eyes of much of the world, what we're doing this morning seems foolish. We are gathered here today to proclaim something that is difficult to believe. Many people in our culture think that what we're doing here is ludicrous.

We're here proclaiming that some 1,985 years ago a Jewish teacher was executed on the fringes of the Roman Empire. And yet, on the third day after his execution, he rose from death. And he then appeared to dozens, and eventually hundreds of his followers.

It seems like a foolish claim to many. After all, it's common knowledge that dead people stay dead. And we're not talking about resuscitation-after-your-heart-has-temporarily-stopped-for-a-few-minutes clinically dead. We're talking really dead. Dead-for-36-hours dead. People who are dead for 36 hours stay dead.

So the resurrection of Jesus appears foolish to many. And they often respond with an attitude of modern hubris. "We know that dead people stay dead." They act like that's some sort of modern discovery.

Which is so ironic. People in earlier eras also knew that dead people stayed dead. In fact, they were more acquainted with death in their everyday lives than we are. Life was "nasty, brutish, and short." And until the late 19th century, families would take care of their own dead. They wouldn't ship the bodies of their loved ones off to professionals. They would prepare the bodies for burial themselves. They wouldn't put makeup on the corpses to make them look lifelike. They wouldn't put AstroTurf around the grave to make it seem more pleasant. They knew what the brutal and stark reality of death was. They knew dead was dead—really dead.

Jesus' disciples also knew that dead people stayed dead. In fact, when Jesus' disciples were first told about the Resurrection, their first reaction was to reject it out of hand. The gospels say that when the women return with the news of the Resurrection this was the disciples' reaction:

"These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them."¹

Or as another translation says,

"(The disciples) did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense."²

Dead people stay dead? No duh. The disciples believed the same thing. But something happened to change their minds.

They encountered the Risen Christ. And after witnessing his living presence in their midst, all of the original disciples, with possibly one exception,³ were willing to face death rather than deny the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And these were guys who were hiding out in fear of death on the first Easter. A few days before, Peter denied even knowing Jesus because he was afraid. On Easter the disciples were still hiding behind locked doors out of fear of arrest and execution.

And yet something changed. Within a mere 50 days, something changed. Something made them willing to stand up publically, come what may, and proclaim the astounding news that Jesus was dead, but was alive again, and had appeared to them and to hundreds of others. And because of that, they were no longer afraid of death. They went to their own deaths rather than deny this assertion.

¹ Lk 24:11

² Lk 24:11 NIV

³ There are mixed traditions about John, that he either was martyred, or that he died in exile of natural causes.

Others may have regarded the news that Jesus was alive as nothing more than foolishness. Others may have been offended by the Easter proclamation. But the disciples were willing to give their lives to share that good news.

Yes, the message of the Resurrection faced great opposition early on. In fact, one of the strongest attackers was Paul, who would later be our Patron Saint.

Paul was nobody's fool. He was EXTREMELY well educated. He was highly trained in Greek philosophy and the Jewish religion. And he initially found Christianity to be not only foolish, but dangerous.

That is, until he himself had an encounter with the Risen Christ. And after that encounter, after experiencing the reality of the Resurrection, Paul went from being one of Christianity's greatest enemies to being one of its greatest advocates.

We heard his words this morning in our Epistle lesson from the 15th chapter of First Corinthians.

He says,

"I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to (Peter), then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."⁴

Paul wrote these words about 22 years after the Resurrection. Paul lists a number of original witnesses: Peter and the 12 disciples... James the brother of Jesus and first bishop of Jerusalem... And more than 500 others, most of whom were still alive at the time of writing.

Paul is saying basically, "You don't believe me? Ask them. They were there. Most of them are still around."

The Cross and the Resurrection may seem foolish. But, notice, Paul is saying they are of first importance. They were the first things Paul learned about after he encountered the Risen Christ himself. They were the first things he in turn taught others. And they were of first priority, they were of primary importance. Nothing was more important.

The Cross and Resurrection might seem foolish to others. But Paul would say they are in reality the most important things in the history of the world.

In fact, earlier in the same Letter, Paul talks about the foolishness of the cross and resurrection.

⁴ 1Cor 15:3-9

In chapter 1 of First Corinthians, Paul says point blank that from a worldly standpoint, the message of the death (and resurrection) of Jesus may seem foolish to humans.

But he says, "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."⁵

Paul is reminding us that God's ways are vastly superior to ours. Even at our wisest and strongest, we fall far short of God, even when God's ways might appear to us to be foolish or weak.

What could be more foolish than an executed criminal turning out to be the Lord of Life? What could be weaker than a man nailed and helpless on a cross?

After all, it was human strength and power and brutality that put Jesus on that cross.

At the cross, power politics seems to win. Brute force seems to win. Death seems to win.

And yet, God is in this crucified man. And in his apparent weakness, he proves stronger than any human power. His love is stronger than any brute force. And death itself proves impotent in the face of his true power. God in his apparent weakness is far more powerful than humans at their very strongest.

It's April Fool's Day and Easter Sunday.

What we're doing this morning may seem foolish. Many people in our culture think that what we're doing here is ludicrous.

And yet we are here to proclaim that God's apparent weakness is far more powerful than any human strength. And God's apparent foolishness is far wiser than any human wisdom.

And so, on this day I pass on to you what Paul has passed on to me.

I pass on to you as of first importance, or primary importance, what I in turn have received: that Christ died for us, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day.

If the world thinks that's foolish, so be it. It's still of first importance, regardless of what the world may think.

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Brutality does not win. Evil does not win. Death does not win. Hate does not win. God wins. Life wins. Love wins.

Christ is risen from the dead.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

⁵ 1Cor 1:25