

Easter 2026: God's Antidote to Stupidity

- Let me introduce our Easter Service theme: *God's Antidote to Stupidity* with a sample of well-intentioned Christian stupidity from last year – none of us are immune to stupidity!

Psalm 118:1-2 + 14-23

¹ O give thanks to the LORD, for God is good;
God's steadfast love endures forever!

² Let Israel say,
"God's steadfast love endures forever.

²³ This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvellous in our eyes.

²⁴ This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

John 20:1-18

²⁰ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus's head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, ¹² and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and she told them that he had said these things to her.

- Coming to Easter Sunday not only do we bring the death of God but our own small & big griefs – I lost my watch a gift from my father 50 year ago – we all long rescue from death
- Here we are celebrating resurrection – wow how to get our head around God breaking into our world to intersect with what is important to us and provide a new future
- A warning there will be some references to bullpoopers in this reflection!
- I love Fran Leibowitz – a sassy commentator on the craziness of contemporary living
- Quote: *Metropolitan Life* (Fran Leibowitz p. 97)
I love sleep because it is both pleasant and safe to use. Pleasant because one is in the best possible company and safe because sleep is the consummate protection against the unseemliness that is the invariable consequence of being awake. What you don't know won't hurt you. Sleep is death without the responsibility.
- Whatever happened on Good Friday Jesus having a nap is not the key take out
- Our theme for this Easter Sunday: the resurrection is God's Antidote to Stupidity
- Quote: 19th Century French novelist Flaubert
To be stupid, selfish and good health are three requirements of happiness, though if stupidity is lacking, all is lost.
- May I say that is reason enough for God to have raised Jesus from the dead!

Prognostic Myopia: The Downside

- Illustration: *A Short History of Stupidity* (by Stuart Jefferies 2025 p. 243-248)

- Jeffries looks at how we have understood human stupidity across the ages and what are the preferred antidotes in any given age including our own
- Arguably, much capitalism is predicated on making us to do stupid things... contrary to our own interests
- Psychologists have a term for this mindless short termism – prognostic myopia
- I love the smell of complicated words first thing Easter morning!
- Prognostic myopia is the human capacity to think about and alter the future, accompanied with the inability to care about what happens in the future
- It describes our collective response to threats: nuclear holocaust, ecological disaster, climate change, starting wars in the Middle East – as proof of human prognostic myopia
- Human intelligence has created a form of stupidity beyond the wit of other animals
- Human intelligence has created accomplishments on track to produce our own extinction – exactly how evolution gets rids of adaptations that suck!
- Most humans are less likely to regard a luxury yacht or a new big TV as environmental disasters – our prognostic myopic response is *I want one too!*
- For us humans it seems deforestation, micro-plastic infestation and species extinction are the prices we are willing to pay to sustain higher consumption
- If I may confess to my own prognostic myopia – we bought a large TV last week – so how stupid are we!
- Quote: The Human Animal: Why We Still Don't Fit into Nature (Markus Gabriel 2024)
Thanks to science and technology, we have rapidly improved our survival conditions. But, by the same means, we have made them worse even more rapidly.
- We are such geniuses that we have used our singularly big brains stupidly to make our habitat increasingly uninhabitable
- To put it another way: we can't stop being stupid

Prognostic Myopia: Organisational Profiles

- Illustration: Alversson & Spicer (*The Stupidity Paradox* 2016)
 - spent a decade studying how management consultancies, banks, engineering and legal firms, pharmaceutical companies, universities and schools functioned
 - They were struck by how organisations with so many intelligent and qualified people do so many stupid things
 - Organisational life leans into functional and structural stupidity where we don't raise problems and keep bad news from people they do not want to hear
 - Supported by startling organisational stupidity where the opposite of what we hope is the result of our efforts:
 - we are baking in our prognostic myopia with ever more algorithms that lead to structural and functional stupidity
 - schools being more focused on developing impressive exam results than educating students
 - senior defence officials more interested in rebranding operations than military operations
 - executives more interested in PowerPoint shows than systematic analysis
 - Boards virtue signalling than calling attention to poor organisational policy
 - Being a good decision-maker does not mean that you make good decisions just that you make decisions
 - Being functionally stupid at work is a good career move as it protects employees from rocking the boat or taking actions that provoke others
 - A large proportion of work involves following scripts: meetings, small talk, emails job interviews – allowing us to avoid thinking too much about what we are doing

- Where employees mindlessly follow scripts in an abundance of pointless jobs that are often bullpoo serving stupidity and prognostic myopia
- A functional stupidity that does not so much think outside the box – more so fails to think within the box – as the Germans say *professional idiots*

Prognostic Myopia: The Upside

- Of course prognostic myopia is not all bad – it is useful to produce short term results, nurture good will, encourage people to get on with the job, drive success
- Of course part of the human gift is that we are able to think beyond the short term delights of stupidity – for instance there is the parable of the chasing hyena.
When chased by a hyena fearing for your life you realise that you have a ham sandwich in your pocket. You pull it out and fling it at the hyena. It eats the sandwich rather than you. Humans have the capacity not merely to run and hide, but to consider the hyena’s motives and reflect on them in such a way as to prevent becoming a predator’s lunch. Humans routinely act based on a theory of the mind to predict and respond to the minds of others. We should be thankful hyenas do not make ham sandwiches!
- Even so we live in a world where Big Tech & AI are lining up to give us ham sandwiches

Prognostic Myopia: Credulous Stupidity

- Human mindlessness can be a wise, non-rational, response to the manifold stupidities of modern life
- One person’s stupidity like Trump’s can bring people together – it confirms the adage that in difficult times we need stupidity more than intelligence to cheer us up!
- In our post-truth world our credulity to believe what we hear provides efficient communication and social collaboration
- As Trump epitomises credulous functional and structural stupidity works
- It is not lying as much as aiming to impress without regard for truth or accuracy – fertile soil for human mendacity and the propagation of bullpoo
- As Harry Frankfurt in his 2005 book *On Bullpoo (sic Bullshit) declares:*
The bullpooeperer (sic) does not reject the authority of truth as the liar does... they (just) pay no attention to it.
- The one key thing in common between bullpooers and liars: our endless supply of human credulity and stupidity keeps them in business
- We are all vulnerable as humans to sophisticated accounts of the mental lives of others to predict future behaviours – a Pandora’s box chock-full of stupid possibilities
 - our fears of immigration taking our jobs and houses
 - our fears of running out of toilet paper or petrol
 - our fears of vaccinations that will hurt us
 - our fears of AI killing all humanity
- Illustration: *The Basic Laws of Stupidity* (Carlo Cipolla)
 1. Always and inevitably everyone underestimates the number of stupid individuals
 2. A certain person can be stupid independent of any characteristics of that person
 3. A stupid person is a person who causes losses to another person or group of persons while themselves deriving no gain and even incurring recurring loss
 4. Non-stupid people always underestimate the destructive power of stupid individuals
 5. Essentially stupid people are dangerous and damaging because reasonable people find it difficult to imagine and understand unreasonable behaviours

Prognostic Myopia: Dangerous Self-Delusion

- Unfortunately Trump is not alone in his functional stupidity

- The Dunning-Kruger effect states that people overestimate their intelligence and make fools of themselves – stupidity is part of the human condition that crucifies the help
- St Paul talked about us all as sinners – I am suggesting that all of us are afflicted individually and collectively by prognostic myopia – we can't help being stupid
- This Easter message may be a case in point of the Dunning-Kruger effect – me trying to show off how clever I am while demonstrating the stupidity that buys big new TV's!

Jesus is Risen

- Prognostic myopia as the human capacity to think about the future, all the while with an inability to care about what happens in the future is a theological & faith dilemma
- When Mary meets Jesus in the garden she does so in a fog of prognostic myopia
- Functional and structural stupidity has led to the demise of her friend and hope
- Trapped in her immediate script & she struggles to see past her immediate circumstances
- Trapped by her present grief and unable to grasp the future of a resurrected Jesus
- Mary's resurrection encounter with Jesus takes her out of her prognostic myopia
- The resurrection story proclaims God raised Jesus to take us out of human prognostic myopia, to attend to the present and lead us into the future
- The resurrection of Jesus is God's antidote to prognostic myopia – to human stupidity
- God in Jesus stands in the midst of our short term inclinations and points us to the future that is now – Jesus is risen here among us calling us out of our prognostic myopia
- Alleluia Jesus is risen and we are here to celebrate God's antidote to stupidity – to a God who resurrects in spite, because and above human prognostic myopia
- We are here to praise the God who resurrected Jesus and at the risk of invoking Dunning-Kruger effect – to feel that we are on the right side of the future

Prognostic Myopia: The Place of Do-Gooders

- So we are here basking in the self-satisfaction of being saved from stupidity by God of Jesus – there is one fly in the ointment in our celebration of God's resurrection of Jesus
- Illustration: Why are we so suspicious of do-gooders? (21 March 2026 New Scientist)
Research on *do-gooder derogation* shows we have a knee jerk revulsion at others selfless acts. We judge others behaviour by the perceived ulterior motive. Once we identify any ulterior motive we often treat such people worse than someone who acted with blatant self-interest.
- That in a nutshell makes sense of why Trump seems to get away with so much
- It is why we give politicians a hard time and dare I say it why we tend to give our religious leaders a hard time

Consider the classic experiment known as the public goods game, in which people are each given a small sum of money that they can choose to put into a pool with the other participants. In much the same way our bank accounts accrue interest, each of those donations will grow in value by the end of the game, when the pot is evenly split up and doled out to every player.

A way of maximising everyone's income is for each person to put as much money as they can into the pool. But selfish actors can share very little, keeping their own account relatively full, and then take a bite out of everyone else's contributions. You might expect people to treat these free riders with contempt. In reality, the most generous contributors are often criticised just as badly by the other players.

- Illustration: *The Social Instinct* (psychologist Nicholas Raihani)

We are all playing a *status game* and are suspicious of anyone who might be faking virtue to boost their own standing within a group.

Imagine your friend Jamie is volunteering at a homeless shelter. They appear driven by a concern for the vulnerable, but you later discover they are only giving up their time so that they can potentially go on a date with the organisation's manager Kris.

- Studies suggest that we take a worse view of Jamie than someone who had taken a shift in a coffee shop to get close to Kris the manager
 - In both cases, people are hiding their true motives, yet we are much more judgmental of the person who is benefitting the needy in a charitable act
 - A phenomenon known as the tainted altruism effect
- If we believe Jesus is resurrected because we get to eat chocolate Easter Sunday most people will look with tainted altruism at our celebration and do-gooding
 - If others think we believe because we have God's favour or that it gets us to heaven most people will look with tainted altruism at our Easter celebration and do-gooding
 - Yet we all need an antidote to stupidity – today we celebrate Easter and the God who resurrects as our antidote to stupidity
 - Faith in the God who resurrects Jesus asks us to straddle celebration that may court suspicion of tainted altruism – let alone trying to make sense of resurrection full stop

Prognostic Myopia: Conclusion

- Today as we celebrate that God raised Jesus from the dead we acknowledge we are all part of the stupidity throng – we all need saving from prognostic myopia
- As the victim of human prognostic myopia Jesus did not raise himself – it was God who brings Jesus resurrection
- God will not and does not abandon us to our prognostic myopia
- In Jesus we are able to honour our future all the while aware how disinclined we are to facilitate it trapped by functional and structural stupidity
- You know I believe in the actual resurrection of Jesus – granted *actual* carries a lot of mixed metaphors – that our crucified God is the antidote for prognostic myopia
- I understand that may be disconcerting to some of you – at the very least you know I believe cause I am paid to believe!
- Some days we believe like Mary through the lenses of prognostic myopia – we see only a gardener, feel our confusion and grief at things gone wrong
- Some days we believe like Mary through the lenses of faith – we see the resurrected Jesus here among us
- Today may we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus – it is the primary witness that the God of Jesus has taken a personal interest in being the antidote to human stupidity
- Today on Easter Sunday may our celebration bring faith in the God of Jesus to recognise through the Holy Spirit the risen Jesus among us, around us, with us and for us all
- May we be go forth to share this news in word, deed and if necessary Easter eggs to all whom we know even if they attribute mixed motives to our belief in the God of Jesus
- Today we are here celebrating we all need help in the face of stupidity – will someone help me to find where can I stream the replay of the resurrection on my big new TV?
- God be praised! Jesus is risen – He is risen indeed!