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Holy Humor Sunday Devotion

April 19, 2020

Find a quiet place by yourself or with another and come to God.

As a way to continue the Easter celebration the church celebrates Holy Humor Sunday. While this is new to Forest Grove, the celebration comes from the early church tradition of Bright Sunday. The week after Resurrection Day was a time of joy and laughter. Churches actively encouraged the faithful to be merry and celebrate the miracle of Christ's Resurrection. It seems particularly appropriate to observe this designated Sunday as laughter is a mean of grace and the quickest and easiest way to spread joy, especially in stressful times.

"He who has the faith has the fun." – G.K. Chesterton

CALL TO WORSHIP – Psalm 66

Knock Knock.

Who's there!

Baron!

Baron who?

Baron mind who you're talking to!

We are gathered to talk to God and to have God talk to us, so

Come and celebrate! Shout joyfully to the Lord, your God! Glorify him with your praise!

Everything on earth will worship you; they will sing your praises, shouting your name in joyful songs. Come and see what our God has done, what awesome things he has done for us!

Let the whole world bless our God and sing his praise.

For our lives are in his hands, and he keeps our feet from stumbling.

OPENING PRAYER

Chuckling, chortling God,

who lifts our hearts when we feel most down,

who strikes the light of joy in the midst of despair's gloom,

who surprises us with wonder and awe,

enter into our hearts this morning, we pray.

Open our minds to the endless possibilities you create for growing closer to you with a giggle.

Open our eyes to your presence in all things, allowing us to respond in joy. Amen.

SONG: "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy

Down in my heart, (Where?)

Down in my heart, (Where?)
Down in my heart,
I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy
Down in my heart, (Where?)
Down in my heart to stay.

And I'm so happy,
So very happy;
I've got the love of Jesus in my heart.
And I'm so happy,
So very happy,
I've got the love of Jesus in my heart.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Sinner: Father, I've been bad. My conscience is bothering me.

Priest: Are you seeking a way to strengthen your willpower?

Sinner: No, I'd like a way to weaken my conscience.

Although our willpower may be weak, our God is strong on forgiveness. Let's us bring our weakness and failings to God.

Forgive us, Lord, when we take ourselves too seriously,
when we don't claim the happiness that is rightfully ours as your children,
when we forget that you will have the last laugh in this world.
Restore to us the joy of our salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

The Gospels tell us over and over again of the joy which comes to us through Christ. When Jesus was around, lives were changed, the sick were healed, the sorrowful began to laugh with joy. The good news is that this joy is now given to us.

SCRIPTURE LESSON John 20:19-31

SONG: Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

MEDITATION

Let's begin with a bit of humor:

(i) A woman is talking to God. "God, how long is a million years?"

God answers, "To me, it's about a minute."

"God, how much is a million dollars?" "To me, it's a penny."

"God, may I have a penny?"

"Wait a minute".

(ii) Jesus, Moses, and an old man go golfing.

The first one to tee off is Moses.

He smashes the ball and it is heading right for the water hazard before the green.

Moses raises his club, the water parts, and the ball makes it to the green.

Jesus gets up to swing, cranks it out, and it is headed for the water hazard.

Jesus closes his eyes and prays.

The ball skips across the water and lands on the green two feet from the hole.

The old man's turn comes and he drives the ball.

The ball looks like it is going to drop directly into the water.

A fish jumps from the water hazard swallowing the ball, as an eagle drops from the sky, grabbing the fish.

As the eagle flies over the green, a bolt of lightning strikes the eagle, making it drop the fish.

As the fish hits the green, it spits out the ball and the ball falls into the hole, making a hole in one.

Jesus looks at Moses and says, "I really think I'm leaving Dad at home next time!"

(iii) A preacher's little boy inquired, "Daddy, I notice every Sunday morning when you first come out to preach, you sit up on the platform and bow your head. What are you doing?"

The father explained, "I'm asking the Lord to give me a good sermon."

The little boy said, "So why doesn't he?"

Laughter, they say, is the best medicine for whatever ails you.

Have you ever played the "Ha, Ha" game? If you are nodding your head yes, you must have been in a youth group during the 1970s. That's when I first played this game and will confess I used it with my own youth groups early on in my ministry. For those of you deprived of this exercise in pure silliness, the Ha, Ha game is pretty simple. All participants are to lie on their back. In a zig zag pattern each participant is then to lay their head on the stomach of the person before them in line so you end up with a chain pattern like this:



After assuming this position, the first person is to give an enthusiastic and energetic "HA!" The next person says, "HA HA!" and so on down the line. What ends up happening is everyone's head bobs up and down with each "HA!" and eventually it is just pure silliness. I was surprised to learn that this has now become a yoga exercise – of course, so it can be "cool." But back in the day when this game was a fad, it was just a way for everyone to be ridiculous and have a good laugh.

"Laughter is the best medicine." Proverbs 17:22 says, "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones." The field of medicine has long recognized the importance of humor. In the 1300s, Henri de Mondeville, a professor of surgery, propagated post-operative therapy with humor. He taught surgeons to see that every aspect of the patient's wellness regimen encouraged joy and happiness, including the use of music and jokes told by cheerful friends and relatives.

Many studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects of laughter. Think about it. How do you feel during or after a good laugh? Laughing is said to elevate the pain threshold and can help break the cycle between pain, sleep loss, depression, and immunosuppression. It lowers blood pressure, epinephrine, and glucose levels, and increases glucose tolerance. Laughter also assists in the recovery and prevention of cancer by increasing natural killer cell activity, the response of gamma interferon and T cells, and improves the defense against respiratory infections. Humor and laughter produce a discharge of endorphins with both euphoric and calming effects.

When I was preparing for this week's service, I remembered that this Sunday, the first Sunday after Easter, long ago was designated by the church as "Holy Humor Sunday." The Sunday after Easter was observed by the faithful as a day of joy and laughter with parties and shenanigans to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. The

custom of Bright Sunday, as it was originally called, came from the idea of some early church theologians that God played a joke on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead.

This seems like an odd designation based on the scripture lesson and it probably also feels odd to even mention it in light of our current world situation with COVID-19, but this is what sparked my thinking.

On that first Sunday after Easter the disciples were huddled in the Upper Room. As the gospel of John tells us, they were there for fear of the Jews. Everything that had happened for the past two weeks led to their fear. I mean, why wouldn't they be dismayed? They had witnessed the trial of their Master. They watched the crowd turn from hailing him as a great leader to baying for his blood. They had seen Jesus stumble along a road under the weight of the cross to which he was subsequently nailed and on which he was left to hang until he died. They had seen him dead and buried. Yet, just week ago they had gone to the tomb and the body was gone. There was talk of angels - but only hysterical women see angels! The grave-clothes were still there - but what did that prove? Not one of the disciples had an easy conscience - save perhaps young John. Their leader, Peter, had denied his master - one of their number had committed suicide - and all of them had deserted him in his agony. They had not, in the end, been prepared to stand alongside him and die with him.

So, they were probably justified in being frightened. If the Jews and Romans got hold of them could they expect better treatment than Jesus had received? If the body of Jesus had gone, who had taken it - and why? And if the story that he had risen was right - what did that mean? What would the Messiah think of his deserter followers? No wonder they were afraid!

Seeking safety, these disciples locked themselves in a small room hoping that all the bad stuff would stay out there and they would figure out from a safe distance how they would ever be safe enough to re-enter the world, their world.

We all live with fears. Humorist Dave Barry said, "Some people are afraid of falling, the dark, of lobsters, of falling on lobsters in the dark."

Those disciples were afraid and not of lobsters, the dark or falling. Their fear held them captive. These were Galileans stuck in Jerusalem because it was just too dangerous to get out and go home. It was just then, when their stomachs were tied up in worried knots that Jesus walks in. That's the joke about this Sunday. When the worst seems to be happening - in comes Jesus. There are no walls thick enough to block the entry of the Risen Christ into the inner sanctum, the safe room the disciples had created at the center of their fears.

Imagine what it must have felt like as they sat there wringing their hands, pretty much talked out and suddenly—Jesus. I think that's what is happening right now as we are sitting in our inner sanctums of our homes, for those of us who are forced to stay there and into the inner sanctums of our work places, for those who must go there as essential workers. I've been trying to watch the last few minutes of the nightly news to get glimpses of good things happening in the middle of this pandemic, but even those stories seem to be drying up. But this past week I participated in a Zoom presbytery committee meeting when the moderator talked about a website put together by the actor John Krasinski that is simply called, "Some Good News." From the isolation of his own home, John Krasinski is finding and reporting on stories that are "Good News." The great thing about them is that they are upbeat and funny by displaying rather ordinary events in an extraordinary time. That's what makes them newsworthy. One story was about people creating their own competitive events in lieu of professional sports. There was one dad who bounced a large ball over his house while he ran around to the back yard, grabbed a hula hoop in time for the ball to bounce through it making a "hole in one."

Another story was about a young teenager's return home from an extended stay in the hospital due to cancer treatments. As her car rounded the corner to her house, the street was lined with parked cars where people were waving, honking and holding up congratulatory signs.

Every part of John Krasinski's "Some Good News" broadcast was encased in good humor. Sure there are stories about people doing good things, but mainly, it's just good clean fun. I found myself laughing out loud even as there were, at times, tears in my eyes. For 15 minutes, the length of each episode, I knew peace and joy. My hearts was lifted. Something magical happened.

When Jesus enters into that locked room, the first thing he offers to his anxious and downtrodden disciples was peace. "Peace be with you." It is at the same time both an ordinary greeting and an extraordinary greeting.

When people are locked in grief—like Mary; locked in fear—like the disciples; and locked in darkness—like the world, into those closed off places enters Jesus. Knock on any door in your community, says Gordon Lathrop, and you'll find some kind of agony. Right now we and the whole world are locked in. But here's the good news – the GREAT news, Jesus can pass through any walls that lock us in, and when he does, there is peace and even joy.

Holy Humor Sunday – Jesus is more powerful than evil; love is stronger than hate; life is given even in the midst of death. That's the joke on all that would drag us down and leave us feeling alone and without a future. That's God's great Ha! Ha! belly laugh. Medical supplies running short – Ha! Ha! Pizza shops and high school robotic teams are manufacturing face shields. Exhausted medical professionals can't go home to get some sleep – Ha! Ha! Luxury hotels are opening their rooms *at no cost*. Feeling blue about being isolated – Ha! Ha! Flowers, a phone call, a note, come unexpectedly. And the list and laughter goes on and on because Jesus keeps coming in and offering something other than despair and hopelessness. Jesus offers peace, release, even for a moment, of the burdens we carry. Jesus offers hope when we can take the step back and see the joy, the beauty, the humor around us.

There always seem to be those pessimists that think this pandemic will be the undoing of society. There are those who think this is the sign of Jesus coming for the final judgment. Well here's the joke, Jesus is already here and I think we are going to come to the other side of this better than we were before and we don't really have to wait for it because it is happening now. Jesus is breaking in even past our "shelter at home" barriers.

I'll give anyone who wants it the web address for John Krasinski's "Some Good News," or you can just look it up yourself. It is definitely worth a look-see. During one of his broadcasts John said, "No matter how tough life can get there is always something good" and "I am only delivering the good news – you are the good news." That's holy humor. Amen.



"Then one day I decided that if life handed me lemons, I'd sell them."

from JoyfulNoiseletter.com
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PRAYER

O Lord, giver of joy and laughter, we thank you for giving us these gifts.

For the moments of laughter and unbridled joy you give to us:

for opportunities to laugh at ourselves, for the belly laughs of children,
for friends and family who love us because of our quirks, and not just in spite of them,
for artists who give us the opportunity to see the world through the surreal,
for the courage to smile even when difficulties arise,
for those who have hope even when others think there is no hope,
for saints in the Lord who overflow with laughter and spread your joy to all of us.

For the great reversal of the Gospel:

that the last shall be made first, that the rejected stone became the cornerstone,
that those who wish to become great must serve, that the lost will be found,
that the small will become great, that though you are Wisdom, you choose to forget our sins,
that when we are weak, your strength shines through us.

O Lord, giver of joy and laughter, we thank you for giving us these gifts.

Thank you for the gift you give us that allows us to enjoy these things to the full.

We can laugh because of the most amazing thing of all –

that you conquered death, that the tomb is empty, that light shone so bright that it overcame the darkness.

Thank you, thank you, thank you! Amen.

SONG: Easter Deck the Halls

Deck the halls with Easter lilies,

Fa-la-la-la-la--le-lu-i-a!

Dance a jig and sing the sillies,

Fa-la-la-la-la--le-lu-i-a!

At the devil, mean, old bloke,

Fa-la-la-la-la--le-lu-i-a!

On whom God has played a joke,

Fa-la-la-la-la--le-lu-i-a!

Devil thought he'd won the battle,

Fa-la-la-la-la-- le-lu-i-a!

Pranced around high in the saddle,

Fa-la-la-la-la-- le-lu-i-a!

Did not know God's special plan,

Fa-la-la-la-la-- le-lu-i-a!

To resurrect the Son of Man,

Fa-la-la-la-la-- le-lu-i-a!

Merry Christians rejoice and sing,

Fa-la-la-la-la-- le-lu-i-a!

Now's the triumph of our King,

Fa-la-la-la-la-- le-lu-i-a!

Lord of Life is ris'n this day,

Fa-la-la-la-la-- le-lu-i-a!

Let the world rejoice and say,

Fa-la-la-la-la-- le-lu-i-a!

SENDING AND BENEDICTION

Go now in Christ's peace and know that the Laughing One called us together so we could share in the laughter of life. The Laughing One sends us out, to carry the joy of life and love to the world. Go out to laugh, to live to love. And when you hear a good joke...remember that sharing is a great thing!