

“The Gift of Laughter”

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Readings from Scripture: Psalm 30:1-5, John 16:16-24

I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me. O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the pit. Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment; his favour is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

Psalm 30:1-5

‘A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me.’ Then some of his disciples said to one another, “What does he mean by saying to us, “A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me”; and “Because I am going to the Father”?’ They said, ‘What does he mean by this “a little while”? We do not know what he is talking about.’ Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said them, ‘Are you discussing among yourselves what I meant when I said, “A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me”? Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn to joy. When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. On that day you will ask nothing of me. Very truly, I tell you, if you ask

anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.”

John 16: 16-24

My wife, Nancy, was not able to be here this week, so I emailed this sermon to her and said, *“Please delete anything that is irrelevant, inappropriate or just plain boring”* so, in conclusion.

Also, when I called Nancy this week she said, *“I have a surprise for you. I bought you a monkey!”*

I said, *“You’re kidding... where’s he going to eat?”*

She said, *“At our table.”*

I said, *“Well, where’s he going to sleep?”*

Nancy said, *“In our bed.”*

I said, *“What about the smell?”*

She said, *“Well...I’ve gotten used to you, I guess the monkey can too!”*

Laughter in its highest form is an expression of joy.

When we experience the reality of God in Jesus Christ we can live life out of a deep sense of joy. That joy can overflow into the lives of others, bring hope and encouragement.

The gift of laughter can bring God’s perspective to our lives, filling us with the ability to cope with difficulty and adversity.

Henry Ward Beecher, 19th century American congregational minister, wrote, *“A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs, jolted by every pebble in the road.”*

Rich Denning, chair of our Personnel Committee, sent me some one liners: *“Don’t let your worries get the best of you, remember, Moses started out as a basket case.”*

Al Hinton sent a list of some church bulletin bloopers:

- The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been cancelled due to a conflict.
- The pastor will preach his farewell sermon after which the choir will sing, *“Break Forth Into Joy.”*

That reminds me of the good news and bad news for pastors:

Good News: The Session voted to send you a get-well card.

Bad News: The motion passed by one vote

The Psalmist writes: *“Oh Lord you have healed me. You have brought me up from the pit. Weeping may linger for a night but joy comes with the morning. You have turned my mourning into dancing.”*

Jesus promises his disciples that even though he was going away their pain would turn to joy.

In Revelation 21:4 there is the promise that *every tear will be wiped away, death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.*

Jesus promises his disciples that no one will take their joy from them. Sin, sickness, evil and death do not have the last word. The resurrected Christ has the last word. We live and work on this earth with that eternal perspective firmly anchored in our hearts and minds. We know life on this earth is short and we are called to live each day to the fullest.

Did you see the news release: “Pillsbury Doughboy, Dead At 71”

“Veteran Pillsbury spokesman, The Pillsbury Doughboy, died yesterday of a severe yeast infection and complications from repeated pokes to the belly. He was 71. The memorial service was attended by dozens of celebrities including Mrs. Butterworth and Hungry Jack, Betty Crocker, the Hostess Twinkies and Captain Crunch.

The graveside was piled high with ‘flours’ as long-time friend Aunt Jemima delivered the eulogy, describing Doughboy as a man who never knew how much he was kneaded. Doughboy rose quickly in show business, but his later life was filled with many turnovers. He was not considered a very smart cookie, wasting much of his dough on half-baked schemes. Still, even as a crusty old man, he was a roll model for millions. Doughboy is survived by his second wife, Play-Dough. They have two children and one in the oven. The funeral was held at 3:50 for about 20 minutes.”

Even in difficult times, people can find humor.

In his book *The Healing Power of Humor*, Allen Klein notes that Abraham Lincoln (one of my distant relatives) had an ability to laugh even in the bleakest days of the Civil War. People who worked with him were often astonished at his perspective. When Stephen Douglas accused Abraham Lincoln of being two-faced, Lincoln said, “*If I had two faces, I certainly wouldn’t wear this one!*”

Many great comedians have experienced tragedy and sorrow in their lives. Jackie Gleason’s father deserted him. W.C. Fields ran away from home because his father was going to kill him. Carol Burnett’s parents were alcoholics who constantly fought. Charlie Chaplin’s father died of alcoholism and his mother suffered from mental illness. Perhaps their humor grew through the water of their tears.

In Proverbs 15:13 the writer says, “A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance.” Proverbs 17:22 – A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.” Many studies have related our mental attitude to our health—a cheerful heart is actually healthy for us. Norman Cousins calls laughter *inner jogging*.

Tuesday is Valentine’s Day, The Day of Love.

That reminds me of the story about the three sons who left home, went out on their own and prospered. After Valentine’s Day had passed, they had a conference call with each other about the gifts of love they were able to give their elderly mother.

The first son, Milton, said, “*I built a big house for our mother.*”

The second, Marvin, said, “*I sent her a Mercedes with a driver.*”

The third, Melvin, said, *“I’ve got you both beat. You know how Mom enjoys the Bible, and you know she can’t see very well. I sent her a parrot that can recite the entire Bible. It took 12 monks in a monastery 12 years to teach the parrot. I had to pledge one hundred thousand dollars a year to the monastery for 10 years, but it was worth it. All Mom has to do is name the chapter and verse, and the parrot will recite it.”*

Soon thereafter, Mom sent out her letters of thanks:

“Milton,” she wrote her first son, *“The house you build is so huge. I only live in one room and the whole place has to be cared for.”*

“Marvin,” she wrote her second son, *“I am too old to travel. I stay home all the time, so I never use the Mercedes...and the driver is rude!”*

“Dearest Melvin,” she wrote to her third son, *“You were the only son to have the good sense to know what your mother likes – **that little chicken was delicious!**”*

Several years ago the largest survey of worshippers in America was conducted. The survey included the 400 fastest-growing Presbyterian Churches (US) – 93 returned the survey. **Laughter** in the worship service was ranked in the top five characteristics of growing Presbyterian churches.

I think the reason for that laughter is the experience of having our lives firmly anchored in the resurrected Christ. That reality makes the gathering for worship an oasis of joy and hope in a desert of depression and fear. We do not gather to escape the problems of the world or the needs of others but to refresh ourselves with God’s perspective.

As the late Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, commented: *“God laughs the laughter of the divine superiority over all the horrible confusion of history that is full of blood and torture and insanity...”*

We see that blood, torture and insanity portrayed before us every day. But we love God and serve others in hope and confidence, knowing that sin, sickness, evil and death do not have the last word. The resurrected Christ has the last word.

We go forth from this place to extend God’s love and joy to others. May God grant us the Gift of Laughter. Amen.