

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4; Proverbs 17:22

Holy Humor Sunday, May 1, 2011

As I was thinking about the theme today, I remembered a favorite story about the grandmother who was taking her young grandson to the movies. She suggested he put a treat of some kind in her bag to munch on during the show. About halfway through the movie, the little boy leaned over to her and whispered, "Grandma, may I have my ice cream sandwich now?"

One of life's little surprises! How do you think Grandma reacted? She could have caused a major scene by yelling; she could have shut out her grandson with angry silence. Or, after a moment of initial shock, she could accept some of the responsibility in the "messy" situation and break into laughter. No doubt, in this situation, as in many we face every day, humor can make a serious difference.

But I hear some intense soul saying, "Life is more than fun and laughter. Floods! Jobs! Divorce! Drugs! Disease! Death! Economy! Just living through an ordinary day with ordinary irritations can put us in a bad mood. How can we think about humor and laughter?" How can we not?! Dr. James Dobson has said, "Humor is the ballast that gives balance in life's turbulent sea." I like to think humor is to life what shock absorbers are to automobiles.

Laughter and a sense of humor are gifts from God. Like any of God's gifts, however, they can be misused. A healthy sense of humor is not distasteful or vulgar jesting. It's not sarcasm or foolish talk that is ill timed or offensive. It's not humor that wounds. It's not the avoidance or denial of problems. It's a delightful expression of thought that lifts our spirits. It's a light perspective on a heavy situation. It's a protection against taking our ideologies and ourselves too seriously.

Our scripture today from Ecclesiastes reminds us, "There's a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance." All of us have experienced heartaches of some kind. We grow through our pain, but we can't park there. God helps us to laugh and dance again. Humor and laughter are given to make our lives better, to make a serious difference in our health, our relationships, and our spiritual lives.

First, humor can make a difference in our health. Our second scripture from Proverbs tells us, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." We might say, it saps a person's strength. Simply put, a person's psychological condition directly affects the person's physical condition.

Dr. Brian Luke Seaward, writing in *Health Progress*, says, "Laughter stabilizes blood pressure, massages inner organs, facilitates digestion, increases oxygen to muscles, decreases muscle tension and promotes an overall sense of well-being."

Some may remember Norman Cousins who overcame a crippling illness by drawing on the regenerating power of laughter. Or, you may have seen the movie about Patch Adams. He was a real-life doctor in West Virginia who successfully used clowning and humor as part of his patient therapy.

Holly Bruback, author of a book on the history of plastic surgery, writes, "I myself subscribe to the notion that by the time you're 50 you have the face you deserve.... After 5 decades of repetitive scowling or laughing, one's attitude

toward life is etched on one's face!" Some people say they're happy, but they forget to tell their faces!

Don't you think anything that can help us stay well, enable us to rise above self-pity and keep us from the brink of a breakdown would be a gift from God? That gift is laughter, but that's not all it does.

Second, laughter can make a difference in our relationships. It's remarkable what healthy laughter does to morale at home, work, school, and church. A good laugh brings sunshine into a room.

A lady named Peggy was nervous about an important dinner party she was giving. Her infant son sensed her tension and became "fussy," adding to Peggy's frustration. In an effort to quiet him, Peggy picked the baby up and kissed his bare tummy. To her surprise he giggled and laughed out loud for the first time. She laughed and relaxed. The baby relaxed. And--the dinner was a success!

Can the laughter of a child change a day? Yes! So can the laughter of an adult. Laughter or anger can determine the mindset of a whole day for dealing with the people we know or even with the strangers we meet. Moms, remember, there's a lot of truth to the adage, "When Momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy!"

Besides making a difference in our health and our relationships, surprisingly enough, the **third** difference humor and laughter can make is in our spiritual lives. In case you haven't heard, "The Puritan age is over!" The legalistic theology that says, "If it's fun, it must not be Christian," and says, "The lower your levity, the higher your piety" are denial of God's gifts.

But some Christians don't see the humor in their own piety. Dr. Dobson tells of a sign on a convent wall that reads, "Absolutely no trespassing. Violators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law." Signed, the Sisters of Charity.

Erma Bombeck wrote of sitting in church a few rows behind a little boy and his mother. He was looking over the back of the pew and smiling at everyone behind him, and they were smiling back. Suddenly his mother realized what he was doing. She turned his head around and whispered in a voice everyone could hear, "Stop that grinning. You're in church!"

If any people have the right to be joyful, it's believers in Christ. He died for us, forgave our sins, sent us the Holy Spirit, and walks with us daily. Think of it, the Creator of the universe loves us and cares about us individually! Those gifts of grace should bring a smile to anyone's face. Even John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said, "Sourness is the devil's religion."

In case you didn't know it, God does have a sense of humor. We see it with Abraham's wife Sarah becoming pregnant in her 90's! (Pat says that's not funny!) They even named their son, Isaac, which means "laughter." We see it on Easter. God had the last laugh over death and evil. That's why we can share Holy Communion together as a family of God even on holy humor Sunday.

There's a Jewish proverb that reads, "In the Judgment, a (person) will be held accountable for every blessing (they) refused to enjoy." Let's not allow that Puritan guilt to rob us of the joy God meant for us as we experience His many blessings.

Well, if we believe healthy humor and laughter can make a serious difference in the state of our body, mind, spirit and relationships, we need to choose to be

one of the joyful people. Perhaps it would help if we adults would hang around more with kids. Research has shown children laugh an average of 400 times a day, while adults laugh about 4 times a day! What does that tell us? Well, first it tells us researchers have entirely too much time on their hands! But it also says-- kids are having all the fun.

Jesus told us to change and become like little children. (Matt. 18:3) Do you think, among other things, he might want us "mature" adults to lighten up?

Yes, I believe he does--**seriously!**

(Intro to Hymn sing)

I have learned something new while at Maple Grove and that is your tradition to recognize "Holy Humor Sunday" the week after Easter. I've always appreciated humor and have tried to include some in my messages, but when Steve Clary told me the Maple Grove Players work with the pastor to present "worshipful humor," I was intrigued. Being retired, it's too late for me to start any new traditions, but I'm glad to join in on yours.

I believe one of the best ways to bring joy to our spirits is to sing. I understand part of the tradition of today is to do something I have always enjoyed in the churches I've served and that is to have an old fashioned hymn sing. Take a moment to find the page number or name of your favorite hymn and we'll sing a verse together.