

The Jokes On Us! Gospel of Luke 12:13-21

This scripture may seem an odd one to begin a Sunday in which we celebrate the gift of laughter, but a wise saying of George Bernard Shaw challenges our assumption “Life does not cease to be funny when people die any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh.” Laughter is a serious part of being human. Some think laughter is based in the most serious aspects of life. Freud said, "Our enjoyment of a joke indicates what is being repressed in more serious talk." And what do we repress most, the reality of death. The great comedian Charlie Chaplin connected laughter and pain, “To truly laugh,” he said, “you must be able to take your pain, and play with it.” The deep irony of this parable - the person doing all the planning and all the work and not being able to enjoy one minute of it - reveals another difficult truth, that we have no control over life itself. So what are we to do, despair.. give up.. cry?

Seneca, a stoic philosopher during Jesus’ time said, “It is more fitting for a man to laugh at life than to lament over it.” And as people of faith we are among all people most equipped to laugh because, “though we do not know what the future holds, we know Who holds the future.” How can we not laugh at this wonderful thing called life? Our temptation, especially in difficult times, is to take ourselves way too seriously. Polish Writer and President, Vaclav Havel who had plenty of serious times in his life once said, “Anyone who takes himself too seriously always runs the risk of looking ridiculous; anyone who can consistently laugh at himself does not.”

That is one of the reasons we must laugh at ourselves, because it reminds us that we are fallible human beings. We are not perfect, quite the contrary. Artist Ralph Steadman suggests “God invented (hu)mankind because (God) loved silly stories.” The Christian virtue that is probably seen least these days, humility is cultivated when we laugh.

Laughter is not just the right thing to do, it makes life tolerable, “If we couldn’t laugh, we would all go insane.” suggests Robert Frost. An article in Psychology Today by Dr. Pamela Gerloff says, “Laughter Enlivens Us.” she describe Norman Cousins’ “self-prescribed ‘laughing

cure.” Cousins, who suffered from inflammatory arthritis, claimed that “10 minutes of hearty guffawing while watching Marx Brothers movies brought him two hours of pain-free sleep—and that both inflammation and pain were significantly reduced....” She goes on to say “research has shown that laughter reduces levels of stress hormones; increases health-enhancing hormones... and improves blood flow to the heart—all resulting in greater relaxation and resistance to disease, as well as improved mood and positive outlook. When we lighten up we feel more positive and optimistic, more hopeful and engaged. We're friendlier, more resourceful, more attractive, more radiantly alive.”

Laughter is life-giving and preserving. Comedian and Social Emotional Learning Advocate, Michael Pritchard warns us “You don't stop laughing because you grow old. You grow old because you stop laughing.”

But laughter is not just good for our health, for it is a powerful weapon to have in day to day living. Oscar Wilde gives advice to any would-be prophet to society when he said, “If you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh, otherwise they'll kill you.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, a famous philosopher of logic, the mind, language and mathematics theorized, “If people never did silly things, nothing intelligent would ever get done.”

Laughter has power in conflict. Agnes Repplier, essayist in the 1800's often published in Atlantic Monthly wrote, laughter is “A way to win arguments: What monstrous absurdities and paradoxes have resisted whole batteries of serious arguments, and then crumbled swiftly into dust before the ringing death-knell of a laugh!” In these violent times laughter may actually be the greatest secret weapon. Actor and activist Alan Alda once said, “When people are laughing, they're generally not killing each other.” Comedian Jeff Dunham's world tour TV special probably did more to help American's accept Muslims than any verbal argument. In the show we see a huge group of Saudi Arabians gathered in the desert in a “tent” laughing hysterically at Achmed the Dead Terrorist. Dunham also goes to Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country, where the social authorities said he could not bring out Achmed, but when the audience begged he brought out Achmed's brother, the French terrorist. And I have to

believe that many of Dunham's fans in the US will have a much harder time stereotyping Muslims now that they have seen that we caught at the same things.

Laughter is most important in serious times. And as Christians we must remember that we are the people of Christmas. No script writer would propose having an unwed pregnant girl run off with her fiancé, only to be turned away at the Hotel 6 and have to give birth to God incarnate in a barn. Oh and let's have smelly shepherds and 3 kings with presents, how about spices? Everybody loves spices? Laughter is about the unexpected and our God shows that She is The Great Comedienne. How could she top that one? Oh wait, Easter, Jesus rising from the dead is God's greatest joke on humanity. The joke that will set us free. Just when all appears totally lost on the cross, as the disciples run and hide and weep. We think every hope, every joy, every possibility is lost to the grave, but God was just preparing to deliver the biggest April Fool's punchline of all time. "He has risen! He has risen indeed!!" "What are you talking about death?" You cannot hold that good man down!" No sir! God loves a good joke... Look at us! A small group of people who with God's help will change the world with the Gospel of the Laughing, Loving God! AMEN

Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.

Galaxy Song - Monty Python

Whenever life gets you down, Mrs. Brown, And things seem hard or tough,
And people are stupid, obnoxious or daft,
And you feel that you've had quite eno-o-o-o-o-ough,
Just remember that you're standing on a planet that's evolving
And revolving at 900 miles an hour.
It's orbiting at 19 miles a second, so it's reckoned,
The sun that is the source of all our power.
Now the sun, and you and me, and all the stars that we can see,
Are moving at a million miles a day, In the outer spiral arm, at 40,000 miles an hour,
Of a galaxy we call the Milky Way.
Our galaxy itself contains a hundred billion stars;
It's a hundred thousand light-years side to side;
It bulges in the middle sixteen thousand light-years thick,
But out by us it's just three thousand light-years wide.
We're thirty thousand light-years from Galactic Central Point,
We go 'round every two hundred million years;
And our galaxy itself is one of millions of billions
In this amazing and expanding universe.

Our universe itself keeps on expanding and expanding,
In all of the directions it can whiz;
As fast as it can go, at the speed of light, you know,
Twelve million miles a minute and that's the fastest speed there is.
So remember, when you're feeling very small and insecure,
How amazingly unlikely is your birth;
And pray that there's intelligent life somewhere out in space,
'Cause there's bugger all down here on Earth!