

**The Twelfth Annual Humor Sunday -
Laughing Last as the Last Spiritual Practice
The United Church of Gainesville,
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Today is our last Sunday in our Soul Station Theme. You can see our list of practices we began sharing in August.

ESSENTIAL SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

- Transform your motivation; reduce craving and find your soul's desire.
- Cultivate emotional wisdom: heal your heart and learn to love.
- Live ethically: Do what's right.
- Calm your mind and slow down.
- Pay attention and be aware.
- Laugh

A minister, a priest, a rabbi, a lawyer, a blonde, a redneck and a dog walk into a bar. The bartender looks up and says, "Is this some kind of joke?"

That's what we're expecting today, some kind of jokes.

Laughter, done right is one of the great healing powers of our world. One of the incarnations of the Buddha is this laughing Buddha that my mother brought back to me from the Great Wall of China. Laughter releases endorphins that release immune boosting hormones. It turns out that just anticipating a time of laughter can release these hormones. So even if you only think this is going to be funny today, that alone should make you healthier for at least the next twenty-four hours.

Humor is funnier when shared in a group. We always laugh more when we're watching a movie or comedian in a theater than we do sitting alone. And coming to humor Sunday here at UCG is about as contagious a laugh machine as you can get.

I'm going to come back to this issue of laughter and healing later, but I wanted a little build up here to let you know that if you don't laugh at my jokes, you may make yourself sick.

Speaking of feeling sick, I telling my doctor that I got this sharp pain in my eye whenever I drank coffee. The doctor told me to take the spoon out before I drank it.

While we speak a lot of the health benefits of faith, there's a down side as well. It was tough being a disciple of Jesus.

"How tough was it?"

You never could call in sick. Jesus just kept healing you.

Speaking of religious jokes, you sent me pages and pages of Adam and Eve jokes.

Did you know that one reason God created Eve was that God knew that one day Adam would require someone to locate his keys as well as the TV remote?

It continues to bother about half the population that Eve was created second. One reason suggested for this is that when God finished the creation of Adam, God stepped back and said, "I think I can do better than that."

It's also been said that Adam complained to God that he was lonely. God said I will make you a wonderful companion. She will be beautiful. She will adore you, take care of you, hang on your every word, and will do everything you want.

"Sounds great," said Adam, "But what will she cost me?"

"An arm and a leg," God replied.

Adam paused for a while and asked, "So what can I get for a rib?"

It's amazing we women and men can live with each other at all. The other night Sandy asked me if I wanted dinner.

"What are my choices?" I asked.

She looked at me and said, "Yes or No."

Most languages have masculine and feminine nouns. The Washington Post did a survey of what gender certain nouns might be in English.

What do you think a Swiss Army Knife would be? Male.

Why? Because although it appears useful for a wide variety of work, it spends most of its time just opening bottles.

What about a photocopier? Female. Because once turned off it takes a while to get warmed up, and then there's something about being an effective reproductive device when the right buttons are hit, but I'm not going to get into that here.

How about a hot air balloon? Male, because to get it going anywhere you have to light a fire under it, and of course there's the hot air part.

Finally, what gender is a remote control? You're saying male, but you're wrong. It's female. Why? Consider this. It gives a man pleasure. He'd be lost without it, and while he doesn't always know the right buttons to push, he keeps trying.

(Men get a tough rap here, but remember the man who was walking along the Pacific Coast Highway and found an ancient pottery jar with a note saying that whoever finds this jar gets one wish from God. As the stunned man holds the jar, God appears and asks for his wish. The man says he'd like a bridge to Hawaii. God says, "You know that's a rather self-centered, materialistic wish, which uses a lot of the earth's resources. What about something more noble, worthy of God?" The man thinks for a while and says, "You're right. I've been married and divorced three times. I'd like to know exactly what women want. What do they mean when you ask them how they are and they say, 'Fine,' or what they really want when they say, 'Nothing,' or how to listen and not give advice when they've got a problem." God thinks for a while and says, "Do you want that bridge to have two lanes or four?")

A man called 911, frantic. "My wife's pregnant," He shouted. "Contractions are two minutes apart. What do I do?" Operator asked, "Is this her first child?" "No," the man screamed, "This is her husband."

And here's my last gender story (drum roll - cymbal crash). There were eleven people being rescued from rooftop during a raging flood, ten men and one woman. They were all hanging on to a rope let down by the helicopter, and were told that one had to let go because the helicopter would crash with more than ten people hanging on. When they couldn't decide who would let go, the woman made an eloquent speech about how she, as a woman would give her life to save others, how women were used to giving up their lives and their needs for husbands and children. At the end of her speech, all the men applauded.

I've got some help with a few questions here. Do you know the roundest knight at King Arthur's roundtable?

Sir Cumference. He got that way from eating too much pi.

Do you why the rubber band pistol was confiscated from algebra class?

It was a weapon of math destruction.

Do you know what they called the short fortune-teller who escaped from prison?

He was a small medium at large.

What happened to the butcher who backed into the meat grinder?

He got a little behind in his work.

By the way, I saw in my religious supplies catalogue a new low-fat yogurt based communion wafer. It's called I can't believe it's not Jesus.

Speaking of the bible, do you know who the greatest financier in the bible was? Pharaoh's daughter. She went to the river bank and drew out a little prophet.

Which reminds me of the story of Moses and the Red Sea, which our children are going to experience next week with (now don't tell the children) Sanford Berg as Moses.

A little boy came home from Sunday school and his parents asked him what they studied. He said, "We had this cool story of Moses and the Israelites. They were escaping Egypt when they came to the Red Sea. Just as the Egyptians were about to capture them, a whole fleet of combat helicopters swooped over the Hebrew people and dropped a set of pontoon bridges. The bridges inflated, opened, linked all the way across the water, and the Israelites crossed the water on the bridges. Just as the Egyptians got to the bridge, the Israelites detonated charges of dynamite all across the bridge, and it blew up and sank.

"Now," said the parents, "We don't believe that. Is that what they really taught you in Sunday School?"

"You're right," said the boy, "That's not what they told us. But you'd never believe the story they really taught us."

Speaking of stories, it's rumored that Bin Laden has indeed died and he has sent back a disturbing message. In heaven it seems that Bin Laden was greeted with great affection by James Madison, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson. When Bin Laden acted confused, they said, "Didn't Allah tell you that when you died you would be welcomed by a throng of Virginians?"

Speaking of religious surprises, a burglar broke into a house and was rifling through the drawers with his flashlight when he heard a voice say, "Jesus is watching you." The burglar shone his light around the room and saw nothing, and started putting things in his bag. A second time, the voice spoke, "Jesus is watching you." Again, the burglar couldn't find anyone. After the third time the burglar shone his flashlight around the room and spotted a parrot, just as he finished talking.

The burglar asked the parrot his name. The parrot said, "Moses."

"What kind of crazy person would name a parrot Moses?" the burglar asked.

The parrot replied, "The same kind of crazy person who would name his Rottweiler Jesus."

Speaking of talking animals, a man was riding down a country road and his car broke down. He opened the hood and was looking at the engine when a cow came up to the fence and said, "I think your radiator's overheated."

Just then the farmer came along, and the man said to the farmer, "That cow just gave me advice on my car."

The farmer said, "The cow with the two black spots?"

"Yeah," said the man, "that's the one."

"Don't pay any attention to her. She doesn't know anything about cars."

City slickers often get in to trouble with farmers and animals. When I lived in New England, it was Vermont where things were a little different. A New Yorker stopped to ask directions of a Vermont farmer who was holding a pig up to an apple tree to let the pig eat apples.

And since New Yorkers can't ever help giving other people advice, he asked the Vermonter, "Wouldn't it save time if you just shook the apples from the tree and let the pig eat them off the ground?"

"Yup, it might," said the Vermonter, "But what's time to a pig?"

Speaking of strange states, did you hear that all the Wal-Mart's in Alabama sold out of guns and ammo last month? They heard that Russia had invaded Georgia, and they weren't going to let it happen to them.

Here's another pig story. A pig went into a bar, ordered fifteen beers and drank them. The bartender asked, "Would you like to know where the restroom is?"

"No," said the pig, "I'm the little pig that goes wee-wee-wee, all the way home."

An Irishman walks into a bar in Belfast and asks for the quickest way to Dublin? The bartender says, "Are you walking or driving?"

"Driving," says the man.

"That's the quickest way," says the bartender.

A waiter asked the diner, "How did you find your steak?" Diner replied, "I just pushed my mashed potatoes over and there it was."

Did you hear about the girl who brought her boyfriend home? Her parents were horrified at his greasy hair, tattoos, dirty language and general hostile attitude. After he left the mother said, "Honey, he doesn't seem like a very nice person."

The daughter said, "Mother, if he wasn't a nice person, why would he be doing 500 hours of community service?"

And this last joke:

Moses was talking to God and said, "Wait a minute, let me get this straight. They get all the oil and we cut off the tip of our what?"

When you have news like that you need humor for your spiritual foundation.

This is our last Sunday at the soul station, and as you think of the spiritual practices of the last six weeks, remember also that the last essential spiritual practice is laughter. In our congregational survey last year, one of the top strengths you listed for this church was our humor, laughter, and fun. I want you to remember laughter as a spiritual practice, a gift of God, even out of the deepest darkness.

Michael Miller of the University of Maryland Medical School studied the blood flow of people watching a stressful movie and that of people watching a funny one.

In this study he measured vasodilatation, the ability of the blood vessels to expand. Poor vasodilatation leads to strokes and heart attacks. The blood flow of the people watching the

stressful film decreased by 30%. The blood flow of those who watched the funny movie increased by 22%, equivalent of a 30 minute workout. So your time here was worth a half hour at the gym.

We all live in broken situations. Our families, our friends, and our co workers are not perfect. Neither are our kids or our in-laws. But the more we can laugh together, the more we are brought together rather than pulled apart. If we are made in the image of God, and God is within us, then God too loves a good laugh, and laughs in our bellies.

Look at the bulletin at the end of the service for our final spiritual practices.

- Smile. It's contagious. Practice smiling at folks when anything is even mildly pleasing.
- Count your blessings. Make a list, really of the good things in your life. These can distance you from negative thoughts that are a barrier to laughter. When you hear laughter, move toward it. If you find happy people laughing, get near them and ask them to share what's been so funny.
- Spend time with people who have incorporated humor into their lives. Their points of view and their laughter are contagious. I would say this would be UCG. We all feed off each other's good humor.
- And as one last spiritual practice, remember one joke from this Humor Sunday and tell it (copies of this sermon are already available in the foyer.)

Prayer -

O Holy One who laughs the belly laugh of the Buddha, who plays the trickster like Wiley Coyote, who comes to us like a beaming child learning her first knock - knock joke or favorite uncle telling the same old joke for the hundredth time - we open our

hearts to your gift of laughter as a path of prayer when we need it the most and know it the least.

We pray that this week when our spirits sag and our souls sorrow, we may pause and remember this morning, when we felt like you were right here by our side rub, rub, rubbing our backs, standing us up and sitting us down with al le lu's, and bringing smiles to all our faces in groans and laughter. And when we remember these moments, we pray that we may take the smiles we have been given and share them with others.

We pray for a world in need of laughter. We pray that our loved ones will be well, and our children safe. And let us see work, and live for peace and green beauty in our world.

Dance in our hearts dear God of laughter and life.

Amen.

Extras:

There was a newly married man who asked his young wife, "Would you have married me if my father hadn't left me a fortune?"

"Honey," she replied sweetly, "I'd have married you no matter who left you a fortune."

And did you ever wonder why we press harder on a remote control when we know the batteries are going dead?

Why do you keep running over a string with a vacuum cleaner, then reach down, pick it up, then put it down to give the vacuum one more chance?

Do you know what you get when you play country music backwards? You get your wife back, your dog back, your truck back, you get out of jail and it stops raining.

You know what you get when you play New Age music backwards? New Age music.

What does it say on a blues songwriters tombstone? "I didn't wake up this morning."

I love the story of the boy whose parents had no religion and had not given their son any religious instruction. He was failing math, and the only alternative to their public school, was Catholic school so they sent him there. He studied every night like they had never seen him study before, and the first test he came home with was a perfect A. When they asked him what made the difference.

The little boy said, "When I saw that guy nailed to the plus sign, I knew they weren't fooling around."

Moving from Muslim heaven to Christian baptism, there was country preacher was baptizing his flock at the river saying he repented of his sins, was changing he ways and wanted to be

baptized. The preacher took him by the shoulders, slammed him under the water, held him under a few seconds, pulled him up and said, "Have you found Jesus?" The drunk said no. The preacher slammed him under the water again, pulled him up, shook him and asked "Have you found Jesus?" The drunk again said no. After the third time the preacher asked "Have you found Jesus?" This, the poor drunk, dripping and coughing said, "Are you sure this is where you lost him?"

Two UF students, Frank and Tom, were on the New York Subway. A panhandler asked for spare change. Frank was quite indignant and said no. Tom looked into his wallet and gave him \$10. Frank said, "You know he'll only use it to buy booze."

Tom said, "And we weren't?"