

Thirteenth Annual Humor Sunday
“Veni, Vidi, Velcro” – I Came, I Saw, I Stuck Around
The United Church of Gainesville,
Larry Reimer
September 20, 2009

Ezekiel 37:1-17 – *The Valley of the Dry Bones*

I love this story of the valley of the dry bones. I love the imagery Vince brought to this story in his poetic presentation of muscle and skin returning to clattering bones, and then the spiritual breath inspired into each body until it comes back to life. Every time any church or dream gets so low that someone asks, “Can these bones live?” this story of Ezekiel is the answer. If we don’t get in God’s way of breathing new life into old bones, what seemed dry as dust can spring to life.

And it is my deep conviction that one way God breathes new life into old bones is through humor.

Here’s an uplifting message that you keep sending me.

A minister, wanting to demonstrate the wages of unhealthy behavior put a worm in a bottle of alcohol, where it died.

Second, he put a worm in a jar of cigarette smoke. It died.

Third, he put a worm in a bowl of chocolate syrup. It died.

Fourth he put a worm in a container of clean soil where it thrived.

The minister asked the congregation what they learned from this. Maxine, sitting in the back replied, “As long as you drink, smoke, and eat chocolate, you won’t have worms.”

Ministry is hard work. In fact a priest and a rabbi were in a head on collision in which both cars were destroyed. Amazingly, neither of them was hurt. After they crawled out of their cars, the rabbi says, “So you’re a priest. That’s interesting; I’m a rabbi. Wow, look at our cars. There’s nothing left, but we’re unhurt. This must be a sign from God that we should be friends and live together in peace.

The priest replies, “Yes, it’s a miracle that we survived.”

“Here’s another miracle,” said the rabbi. “My car is destroyed, but this bottle of wine didn’t break. Surely God wants us to drink the wine and celebrate our good fortune.” He hands the wine to the priest.

The priest nods, opens the wine, drinks half of it and hands it back to the rabbi.

The rabbi nods, takes the wine, and puts the cork back in the bottle.

“Aren’t you going to have any?” says the priest.

“Not now,” says the rabbi. “I think I’ll wait until after the police make their report.”

The priest and rabbi seem to encounter each other a lot.

A priest and a rabbi were sitting next to each other on a plane. The priest asked the rabbi if it was still forbidden for Jews to eat ham. “Yes it

is,” said the rabbi. “Did you ever eat ham?” The priest asked. “Yes, once in I succumbed to temptation and had a ham sandwich.” They both then went back to their reading. After a while the rabbi asked the priest “Is it still true that priests must remain celibate?” “Yes it is,” replied the priest. “Did you ever succumb to the temptations of the flesh?” The priest said, “I have to admit, once when I was younger I slept with a woman.” The rabbi replied, “Beats the hell out of ham, doesn’t it.”

Here’s one with a priest, a Pentecostal preacher and a rabbi who challenged each other to a preaching contest. They would all go into the woods, find a bear, preach to it, and try to convert it. Two days later they got together to discuss the experience. Father Flannery said, “Well, I read to him from the Catholic Catechism and then I sprinkled him with holy water and - Holy Mother of God, he was gentle as a lamb. My bishop is coming next week to give him first communion.”

Rev. Billy Bob was next and said, “I read to my bear from God’s HOLY WORD! I took HOLD of him and WRESTLED him down to the creek, and I BAPTIZED him and he became gentle as a lamb. We spent the rest of the day praising JEESUS.”

They both looked down at the rabbi, who was in a body cast, traction, IV drips, and hooked up to multiple monitors. The rabbi said, “In retrospect, circumcision may not have been the best way to start.”

I’ve never had a Muslim joke before, but here goes. A man is walking through Central Park in New York and sees a young girl being attacked by the Pit Bull. He risks his life by wading in to pull the dog off the little girl. He saves the girls life but has to kill the dog in the process. A police officer who had seen the incident from a distance runs up and says to the man, “You are a hero. Tomorrow you will read in the paper, ‘Brave New Yorker saves life of little girl.’”

The man replies, “But I am not a New Yorker.”

“Then it will read, ‘Brave American saves life of little girl.’”

“What are you then?” the police officer asks.

“I am a Saudi,” the man replies.

The next day the headline reads, “Islamic Extremist Kills Innocent American Dog.”

See doing noble deeds according to our faith is often a little dangerous. A man died and stood before St. Peter, who said, “Before I can let you into heaven, I have to know if you’ve done anything especially good.”

“Well says the guy, “once I was in a bar and I noticed this big mean biker harassing this poor, frail woman. She was obviously terrified and no one else in the bar was brave enough to help her. So I went over, tapped the biker on the back and said, “Look here, you big ugly cuss, let this woman alone, or you’ll have to answer to me.”

St. Peter impressed said, “That’s a pretty noble action. When did this happen?”

Guy looks at his watch and says, “About three minutes ago.”

Speaking about heaven, a man decided to do research about churches and their connections with God in heaven. He starts on the west coast and goes to the beautiful Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. He notices a golden telephone on the wall. He asks the priest about it who tells him that this golden telephone connects directly to God in heaven and he can use it for \$10,000. He thanks the priest and continues on his way. He goes to New York, to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, same golden phone, same fee, same explanation.

He then goes to the United Church of Gainesville, sees the same golden phone, but the sign here says "phone call free". He asks Sandy Reimer what this means. She replies, "Oh you're in a church that's Open and Affirming where all the children are free and creative and all the people are friendly and caring. You're at the United Church of Gainesville. Here heaven is a local call"

Speaking of church, two people were recently washed out to sea on a fishing trip and found themselves stranded on a desert island. One made all kinds of frantic attempts to signal for help. The second just sat there. Finally the first said to the second, "We're stuck out here in the middle of nowhere, aren't you going to do anything to get us rescued?" The second calmly replied, "I pledge \$50,000 a year to UCG. Larry will find me."

Speaking of pledges, did you hear that the WUFT public radio station was recently robbed? Yes the thieves got away with \$25,000 in pledges.

All of this is to get you ready for the UCG pledge campaign which begins in about a month.

Those were some long stories. The Washington Post held a contest to create some new words. Here are a few.

Innoculate: To take coffee intravenously when you're running late.

Osteopornosis: A degenerate disease.

Bozone (n) the substance surrounded stupid people that stops bright ideas from penetrating. The bozone layer, unfortunately, shows little sign of breaking down in the near future.

Dopeler effect: the tendency of stupid ideas to seem smarter when they come at you rapidly.

(Censored from the worship service but okay, I think, for the internet) Ignoranus: a person who is both stupid and an asshole.

They also have alternative definitions to traditional words.

Here are three.

Abdicate: to give up all hope of ever having a flat stomach.

Balderdash: a rapidly receding hairline.

Flatulence: the emergency vehicle that picks up someone who has been run over by a steamroller.

I saw a sign in my veterinarian's waiting. "Be back in five minutes. Sit! Stay."

Speaking of animals. Have you noticed all the interesting cross breeds these days?

There's the Malamute and the Pointer = a Moot Point, a favorite of lawyers, but it doesn't seem to matter.)

Then there was the Pointer and the Setter = Poinsetter, a traditional Christmas pet.

I am amazed at the creativity of crossing a Pekinese and Lhasa Apso = a Peekaso, an abstract dog.

Terrier and a Bulldog – a Terribull, a dog that makes awful mistakes.

Bloodhound and Labrador – a Blabador, a dog that barks incessantly.

And of course there's the Bull Terrier and a Shitzu = a Bullshitz, a gregarious but unreliable breed.

More important than labels to us, of course, is a sense of morality and fairness we instill in our children. Here's a story of a coach who called one of his 9-year-old baseball players aside and asked, "Do you understand what cooperation is? What a team is?" The little boy nodded yes.

"Do you understand that what matters is whether we win or lose together as a team?" Yes again.

"So," the coach continued, "I'm sure you know when an out is called you shouldn't argue, curse the umpire, or call him a block-head. Do you understand that?" The boy nodded again.

"And when I take you out of a game so another boy gets a chance to play, it's not good sportsmanship to call your coach a dumb-bell is it?" again the little boy nodded.

"Good," said the coach. "No go over and explain all that to your grandmother."

Last year I spoke about researchers at the University of Maryland indicating that laughter improves our circulation as much as exercise. This year Susan Cary sent me research from Radboud University in the Netherlands that claims that laughter does more than simply replace negative thoughts and attitudes with positive ones. In fact the cognitive labor required to process a joke may be the key to the joy of getting a good joke. "Getting" a joke requires problem solving, and your brain's light-hearted detective work may help relieve anxiety.

So I close with a puzzle to solve that uses your brain in a number of ways and thus should relieve any residual anxiety that may remain within you this morning.

Listen carefully.

Pick your favorite number between 1-9

Multiply it by 3.

Add 3.

Then multiply it by 3 again. (take extra time for this if you need it.)

Now add the digits together.

Got your number

This number will give you your role model from the list below.

1. Einstein
2. Oprah Winfrey
3. Barack Obama
4. Hillary Clinton
5. Jimmy Carter
6. Gandhi
7. Martin Luther King, Jr.
8. Mother Theresa
9. Larry Reimer (You got nine? I just seem to have that effect on people)
10. JFK

You have just spent forty five minutes of your time in a state of humor-triggered grace. This is the way we conclude our theme of Weaving the Web of life. Part of the way our web connects us is through laughter, for how can we be angry with someone we just laughed with? And is not laughter one of the greatest miracles of human life?

The truth of my sermon title, Veni, Vidi, Velcro, "I came, I saw, I stuck around"... is probably true largely in part because we've been able to laugh so much together.

I know that each of us has had some tough times in the past week, some more than others. My hope is that today's laughter may have healed some of the wounds of the past week. I know there will be struggles in the week to come, and my hope is that sometime in the week ahead, in a tough moment, or a boring meeting, or a tense encounter, you may remember one of today's jokes, maybe a short one like this: What did the one cannibal say to the other when he ate the clown? "Does this taste funny to you?"

And you'll smile, and that will be your prayer that will in some way contribute to a healing of our world.

Prayer –

Where does laughter come from God? What causes that rumble to stir deep inside us until it comes out with chuckles and guffaws and give us that most beautiful of all makeovers, a smile?

Whatever it is God, thank you.

We pray to remember the feelings of this morning and take them into our week.

Help us to remember this morning when we lost some of our worry and found a piece of our laughing souls. Help us to remember this moment when we lost some of our worry over ourselves and found you, God, rubbing our backs when we sang, "al le la le la le la le lu ia." Help us to remember you laughing along with us at the good jokes and groaning with the bad. Help us to remember this moment when, later this week, life is much tougher than it is right now.

And we pray that we may see the laughter of this time and place like a pebble dropped in the still pond that is the world's longing, with rings of joy flowing out to its farthest banks.

Keep us safe O God, and keep those we love safe. And somewhere, some time this week, let us bring a smile to someone we don't even know. Let us make the world a better place.

Amen.