

**Fourteenth Annual Humor Sunday:
"Laughter: Bringing Heaven to Earth"
September 19, 2010
The United Church of Gainesville
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SCRIPTURE –

Psalm 112 – (Stephen Mitchell's paraphrase,)

Happy are those who laugh with God...

Their rising is like the sunrise and their light fills heaven and earth.

Their laughter shines on all people; their good works endure forever.

Ecclesiastes 10:26 Bread is made for laughter and wine for the gladdening of life.

Luke 7:33-35 (Sometimes even Jesus just can't win)

For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine,

And you say, "He has a demon";

The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say,

"Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!"

Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children.

There's a polka, "In Heaven There is No Beer, That's Why We Drink it Here" which the University of Iowa plays after every victory of every sport. The University of Idaho plays it after every game, win or lose. Given beer's capacity for inducing both joy and grief, depending upon its use and abuse, I'm not going to spend a sermon debating whether or not it is served in heaven.

There's a counter wish in Tucker Max's book and movie, "I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell", a kind of male as idiot story to which I would say to Max, "Don't count on it."

But I do believe, deep in my heart, that there must be laughter in heaven. Laughter on earth alters our bodies and souls and gives us for a moment, a glimpse of eternal joy that is anything but boring. Laughter always involves a leap of faith.

For example there was a mountain climber who lost his footing on a steep slope. His rope snapped but at the last moment he managed to grab the edge of an overhanging ice platform with his finger tips.

Hanging high over sheer nothingness, he calls out, "Help, is there anyone there?" Nothing. He tries again. A deep voice surges from the abyss, "Yes. It is God."

The mountain climber waits, his fingers freezing and losing strength. The voice continues, "If you trust me, just let go. I will send two angels who will catch you as you fall."

The mountain climber thinks for a moment and calls out again, "Is there anyone **else** out there?"

Speaking of getting help, a priest, a praise minister and a guru (I guess the rabbi was out sick) were discussing the best positions for prayer while a telephone repair man worked nearby.

"Kneeling is definitely the best way to pray," the priest said.

"No," said the praise minister, "the best way to pray is standing with my hands outstretched to heaven."

"You're both wrong," said the guru. "The most effective prayer is in the lotus position, palms turned upward with thumb and forefinger touching."

The telephone repairman couldn't help himself. "Hey folks, the best praying I ever did was when I was hanging upside down from a telephone pole."

People definitely find faith in tough times. Did you ever wonder if an atheist can get insurance against acts of God?

But belief in God can have its problems too. There were two particularly mischievous brothers, eight and ten years old who were always in trouble. Their parents were at their wits' end when a minister came through town with a reputation of being quite successful in redirecting children's misbehavior. The parents of the two boys asked the minister to help them.

He insisted on seeing each boy alone, and started with the eight year old. The preacher sat the boy down and with a deep booming voice asked, "Do you know where God is son?"

The boy was simply astonished, and couldn't answer.

Again the preacher intoned, "Where is God?"

The boy still couldn't answer.

A third time the preacher spoke even louder, shaking his finger at the boy, "Where is God?"

The little boy ran from the room in terror, went directly home and hid in his room. His older brother found him and asked, "What happened?"

The younger brother gasped, "We're in BIG trouble this time. God is missing and they think we did it."

Getting back to our theme of heaven, a UCG member and a Baptist both died and went to heaven. The Baptist was welcomed with a kind handshake, thanks for a life well lived, and a pleasant cottage to spend eternity in. The UCG member got a brass fanfare, a big hug from God, a red carpet rolled out and a mansion that looked like our church where she would spend eternity.

The Baptist called St. Peter aside and said, "I don't mean to complain or anything, and I'm happy with what I've been given, but I knew that UCG member and she wasn't any better than me on earth. What's with her special treatment?" St. Peter replied, "Oh it's not that she's so much better than you. It's just that we only get someone from UCG about ever twenty or thirty years in heaven."

Speaking of diversity, a man got a new Lamborghini sports car which he was so excited about, he asked the priest to bless it. The priest said, "What's a Lamborghini?"

Disappointed the man asked a rabbi to bless it. The rabbi too said, "What's a Lamborghini?"

Finally the man found a Unitarian Universalist minister and asked him to bless his Lamborghini. The Unitarian minister was so excited, "Oh I love Lamborghini's. What color is it? What model? What size engine does it have? Can I drive it?"

The car's owner was thrilled until the Unitarian minister asked, "But what's a blessing?"

Continuing our diversity in heaven theme, three couples, Jewish, Catholic, and Mennonite were waiting at the gates of heaven to see if they were allowed in.

St. Peter tells the Jewish couple that they can't get in because they have an excessive love of money. The Jewish man denies it, but St Peter says this is all to clear, "Look, he says, "Even your wife is named Penny." So the Jewish man says, "Come on Penny, let's go."

Next the Catholic couple approaches St. Peter who tells them that they too will not be admitted. "You're far too fond of wine."

When the man argues, St. Peter says, "Look your wife is named Sherry. That says it all."

At this point the Mennonite grabs his wife and says, "Come on Fanny, let's get out of here."

Again, more of religious diversity, what do you call two nuns who are percussionists but only have one drum?

A co-nun-drum.

Speaking of instrumentalists, do you the difference between a trumpet player and government bonds?

Government bonds eventually mature and earn money.

Do you know why bands have bass players?

To explain thngs for the drummer.

It's not fair to pick on drummers. I remember a time the bass player locked his keys in his car. It took two hours to get the drummer out.

Shifting gears now. Really no more drummer jokes.

Why did the urologist lose his license?

He was in trouble with his peers?

Here's one to listen to very carefully. What do you get when you cross a cantaloupe with a border collie? Listen hard now.

Melancholy babies.

Here's one everyone can remember. What do you call cheese that doesn't belong to you? Anyone?

Nacho cheese.

Back to ministers. There was a minister who loved golf so much that one day he just called in sick on a Sunday morning and went to a golf course a half hour away from town to play a round by himself.

St. Peter points this out to God and said this man must be punished, at the very least for lying to his congregation about his whereabouts.

God agrees and mutters a few words under his breath.

On the next hole the minister hits a 450 yard hole in one.

St. Peter protests "I thought you were going to punish him."

God says, "I did. Who can he tell?"

You know there really aren't any minister, priest and a rabbi walk into a bar jokes.

But there is another story, and this is a very narrow interest bar joke. A Bb a Db and an F walk into a bar. The bartender says, "Sorry, we don't serve minors here." (Tane' do you want to explain?)

A minister, priest, and rabbi were out in a boat fishing. At one point the minister, says, "I'm thirsty" gets out of the boat, walks across the lake to the shore and comes back with a soda.

The rabbi, says, "I'm thirsty too." And does the same.

The priest has never seen this before but figures if he is clergy of the one true church, this walking on water should work for him too. He steps out of the boat, sinks under the water and comes up choking and coughing. As they pull him out of the water, the minister says to the rabbi, "You think we should have told him where the rocks were?"

Ministers are actually and typically quite nice people. There's a story of an Episcopal priest, wearing his clerical collar, visiting his wife in the hospital. He hugs her and kisses her when he arrives and hugs her and kisses her when he leaves. Later his wife's roommate commented, "Your pastor is sure a lot friendlier than mine."

Heaven just keeps figuring in these jokes.

Three couples, one elderly, one middle aged, and one newlywed want to join a very conservative church. The minister tells them they have to abstain from sex for two weeks before being accepted into the church.

Two weeks later all three couples report in. The elderly couple says it was no problem, and the pastor says, "You're welcome at our church.

The middle age couple says it was tough. They even had to sleep in separate bedrooms for a few nights, but they made it. The pastor says, "You're welcome at this church.

The newlywed couple the husband says they only managed for one week. "What happened?" asked the pastor.

"My wife was bending over reaching for some vegetables, and I couldn't help myself. We had sex right then and there."

"Well, you're not welcome here in this church," says the pastor.

"That's okay," says the young man. "That's pretty much what they said at Publix too."

Here's my closing joke on heaven.

Every ten years or so God separates the men and women who arrive for questions. This time God sent the women with St. Peter. When he had the men

alone, God asked them to form two lines, one for men who believe their wives were in charge in their marriages and the other for those who believed they were in charge in their marriages. The line of men who believed their wives were in charge of their marriages extended practically out of sight. One man joined the line where the men were in charge.

God was flabbergasted. "I don't expect all men to be in charge of all marriages, but I'm amazed there isn't some balance here. You men are pathetic. Some of you need to take a lesson from this one man who is in charge of his marriage. Sir, how did you accomplish this?"

"I don't know," said the man "my wife just told me to stand here."

So those are the jokes for today. It's been quite a shift to move from the last three weeks with all the heaviness of Rev. Terry Jones' threat to burn the Quran. And of course each of us carries private wounds and struggles in our hearts that are heavy and hard to bear.

I said earlier that I truly believed that there was laughter in heaven. I trust that in our laughter together, we have tasted the just desserts of eternity, the ice cream of heaven. One of the things you and I all enjoy the most about this church is that we can laugh here.

Nothing gives me more hope about tomorrow than the assurance that it will contain laughter. The same is true of this church. We can pretty much trust that whenever we gather here, there will be laughter. Author Annie Lamott calls laughter, "carbonated holiness" and as such, it is another way grace happens.

I go back to the story Jesus tells of John the Baptist eating no bread and drinking no wine and the folks saying he had a demon, and of his coming both drinking and eating and folks saying he was a drunkard and a glutton. I think Jesus was affirming the joy and laughter of life. But there's one more sentence to this passage we often miss. Jesus concludes with these words, "Nevertheless wisdom is vindicated by all her children." Wisdom is a feminine name for God in times between Hebrew and Christian scripture. She is often called Sophia. Wisdom, Sophia, is a God of joy, and I believe that her children are laughter.

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, 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.