

MARCH 10, 2024, PASTOR ROXIE DAVIS Preaching Series: Christian Disciplines

SERMON: How to Laugh SCRIPTURES: Genesis 17: 15-19; 18: 9-15; 21: 1-7;

Luke 6: 20-23

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINES

Today we are in the second of our 5-week series on Christian Disciplines. Last week we talked about the Discipline of Prayer. Today we are going to talk about the Discipline of Laughter (it sounds like an oxymoron), next Sunday I will be here as the Liturgist, not as the Preacher because Renee Pettinger, Director of the Blue Water Area Relief Mission (BWARM) will speak about How to Serve by Relating. This church has supported BWARM, the Men's Homeless Shelter in the past. It has a new director and a new direction in the employment of Renee. Renee Pettinger is a faithful person who does very important work with the least among us. She has a lot to teach us about how to serve. Be here next week.

DISCIPLINE OF LAUGHTER

Now to the Discipline of Laughter. We don't really think of having fun, laughing, En"joy"ment as a Christian "Discipline." But I read the Gospels and I see Jesus enjoying a wedding feast; changing water into wine—I know some of you would like to know how to do that. In fact, a friend of mine gave me a dishtowel that says: "Does anyone know which page in the Bible tells how to turn water into wine." At the bottom of the dishtowel it says: "Just asking for a friend."

It is apparent in Scripture that Jesus enjoys being with his disciples. In fact, my favorite portrait of Jesus is "The Laughing Jesus" painted by Willis Wheatley who was, at the time, working for the United Church in Toronto, Canada. (*Print of Picture*) Jesus knew that life is to be enjoyed; Life it to be lived. He says, as we heard today, from Luke 5: "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

Some of you have experienced that: Unexpected joy—a silver-lining—a funny twist—in the midst of a trying time in your life. It is good to talk about laughter and joy, even in the most desperate times in our lives. Laughter—Joy are gifts from God.

SCRIPTURES

There are many scriptures in the Bible that refer to laughter and joy—the two words are closely tied. Here are just a few of the Scriptural gems about laughter and joy. They come from the Wisdom literature in the Old Testament. You will see that it is wise to laugh and be joyful.

Psalms 126: 1-3 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy. Then it was said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced." **Proverbs 15:13:** "A glad heart makes a happy face; a broken heart crushes the spirit."

Proverbs 17:22: "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength." In relating to a person's strength, it says in Nehemiah 8:12 "The Joy of the Lord is my strength." Words to live by.

LAUGHTER IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL

Besides, the encouragement in the Bible that laughter and joy are an integral part of who we are as God's beloved creatures, there is a great deal of evidence that Laughter and Joy are good for your Health.

The research says: "Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thus improving your resistance to disease.

Laughter triggers the release of endorphins. Those are the body's natural feel-good chemicals, which promote an overall sense of well-being and temporary pain relief.

LONGER LIFE—WOMAN AT LAKESHORE

Many of us know that one of the qualities of longer life is active social life and relationships. A woman in the Lakeshore Presbyterian Church, where my husband, Bill serves as pastor, shared this insight with him: "Most of these past few years, I stayed to myself in my apartment, and I didn't have a lot of contact with others. I hardly ever laughed. And then I came to this church, because I got a postcard, inviting me, in the mail. Now I gather with my church friends, and I laugh a lot. I think it is good for my health."

SCRIPTURE GENESIS 17,19,21

Let's go to the Old Testament Scripture for today about Abraham (the father of our faith) and Sarah (he mother of many nations). I suggest that you read in your Bible the whole story of Abraham and Sarah. It is a bit complicated so reading the whole story in Genesis will help you with your understanding. Sarah is barren—without children—She is in her 90's and Abraham is pushing 100 years old. God speaks to Abraham and says, "You will have a child by Sarah in your old age." Now you need to know that God says this to Abraham, three different times. But we read that this second time, Abraham laughs, to himself. But if you read it closely, I think it was a deep belly laugh. Men do that all the time. Abraham finds the whole idea rather humorous. God doesn't reprimand him for laughing, because God knows that Abraham is faithful. I think God's attitude is, "Just watch me." The next time that God tells Abraham that he will have a son is through three strangers—whom are assumed to be angels—representing the presence of God. After having a big meal prepared by their host, Abraham, the three angels want to know where Sarah is. She is in the tent, behind them. They again tell Abraham that he will have a son by Sarah in her old age. This time—Sarah laughs to herself—giggles perhaps--but the three angels hear her. She's afraid that she will be reprimanded For laughing, so she lies: "I didn't laugh." But the angels know otherwise.

And the last scene in this birth scenario is this: Sarah does get pregnant by Abraham (no immaculate concept here). And they have a son. Guess what his name is: Isaac which means "laughter." And then Sarah says these amazing words: "God has brought me laughter, and Everyone who hears about this will laugh with me. "It seems to me that God has a great sense of humor especially when he works miracles and surprising incidents in our lives.

SCHOLARLY INSIGHT:

"Once a scholar of theology was asked: "Does it say anyplace in the Bible that Jesus, God's Son, laughed?" The answer from the scholar was this: "I don't know if it says Jesus laughed any

place in the Bible. “But I do know that Jesus certainly fixed it so we could laugh!!” (just like Sarah and Abraham in the Old Testament). “By Jesus dying on the cross and removing the penalty for our sins, and promising us Eternal Life, Jesus certainly fixed it so we could laugh at ourselves and at life.”

THE CHOSEN

Many of you have heard me talk about the Video Series, “The Chosen.” On Wednesday nights, a group, not just from this church, But a variety of people, have watched the First 3 Seasons of “The Chosen,” in our parlor. The Video Series takes Biblical occurrences surrounding Jesus and His disciples and projects it on the screen, taking some artistic license, to portray the life of Jesus and the “Chosen,” --his 12 disciples. Jesus’ life on earth comes alive with historical data but also with artistic embellishment. As I lead the “Chosen” group on Wednesday nights, I see my job as pastor to help people separate out those two aspects historical Biblical account and artistic embellishment.

We will begin watching the 4th Season the week following Easter on Wednesday nights, 7:00 p.m. You are all invited to come and see the “Chosen.” And if you haven’t seen the first three seasons, we have the DVDs, and you can borrow them. Just let me know. Why am I telling you all this in relationship to laughter and joy? Because two comments about the Chosen series have come to me several times since its inception: First, they say to me: “Jesus and the 12 Disciples are so human. I really can relate to them.” Second comment, “There is humor, laughter, and joy in the midst of hardship. The sharing of the solid message of “love and joy,” in the midst of oppression and darkness, certainly is portrayed in the “Chosen.” I believe that Jesus knew how to en”joy” life and I believe he laughed out loud, as portrayed in the “Chosen.”

TECHNIQUES HOW TO HELP PEOPLE LAUGH

If God and Jesus can make us laugh, we need to be about mimicking that godly quality. As I said before, laughter and joy are related. Laughter is how we can see and hear joy. Let us make our joy, visible and audible, as we help others laugh, as God has helped us laugh. even in the tough moments. They say that laughter is the best medicine, so here are two techniques to make others chuckle.

It’s the small things that give us joy. Smile at someone you don’t know. **Interact** with another person in a joyful manner. **Share a funny story** or experience from your life—my only advice: “keep it short and to the point.” They don’t want to hear your whole life story that you may see as one long joke. **Enjoy a moment of fun** and invite others to be a part of that. If you have been blessed with a **contagious laugh, share it.** Helenann Norwood has been blessed with a laugh that makes me laugh. She sits on the church Finance Committee, and she makes us laugh—along with the comments of one of the men in the group that is always saying something funny. I know you are thinking, how can you “laugh” in a serious Finance Committee meeting. Frankly, laughing makes our tasks in Finance more “Fun.”

Another Technique: Make up or learn clever puns. My husband Bill humors me all the time, with his puns—usually early in the morning--sometimes they are stupid puns since they are silly wordplays. But most of the time, I start my day with laughter. Let me give you some examples: I used to be a banker, but I lost interest. I am reading a book about anti-gravity. It's impossible to put the book down.

Last Technique—Tell a Joke I think you will hear plenty of jokes during the Talent Show today. **BIBLE JOKES:** But one of the people in The Backstory Class, who was studying along with others, the Scriptures for today. She asked, “so if you are preaching on laughter, what jokes are you going to tell?” Here they are: They are all Bible jokes—if you don’t know the stories from which the joke comes, get busy and look it up in your Bible. I chose these jokes because they are not deep belly laughing jokes—they just make you smile—giggle or groan—because they are funny. Here goes: At what time of the day was Adam created: A little before Eve. Did Eve ever have a “date” with Adam? No, just an “apple.” Who was the most savvy business woman in the Bible: Moses’ mother: She went down to the bank of the Nile and pulled out a little “prophet.” Who was the greatest comedian in the Bible? Samson—He brought the house down. (you got to know the story of Samson to understand this joke) Which servant of God was the worst lawbreaker in the Bible? Moses. He broke all 10 Commandments at once. Last week of Jesus’ life on earth, and Jesus goes into the temple. This joke comes out of that event. Who was the best DJ in the Bible? Jesus: He turned tables. (Matthew 21/ Mark 11) How could the Son of Man, “pay it all.” Because Jesus “saves.” (Read the crucifixion story in all four Gospels) **That’s it!**

ENDING

In the midst of a very heckling political election year; in the midst of conflict and fear around the world; in the midst of community divisions, Nehemiah 8:12 says: “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” Laughter, Joy is a gift from God. It can make us strong: physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, because it is a characteristic of God—Claim it, especially in these times of Chao, Confusion and Disunity.

DOG CALENDAR

I have this calendar that my good friends, Alex and Peggy Ruthven gave to me. Every day, I pull off the calendar day and every day, I see a different dog’s face on the calendar. And printed right below the dog’s face is a wise saying usually from someone famous, **I close with this quote from Germany Kent, an African American woman who has broken many glass ceilings.** A journalist, actress, businesswoman, philanthropist, author, and faithful Christian. Here is what she wrote:

“Be around people that make you want to be a better person, who make you feel good, make you laugh and remind you what’s important to life.”

Comedian Charlie Chapman said: “A day without laughter is a day wasted.”