Springfield Presbyterian Church

April 16th, 2023

The God of Laughter

Holy Humor Sunday

1. Introduction

As we come to celebrate this Holy Humor Sunday, I must

admit that I thought about passing the baton off to another preacher. This year, I wasn’t feeling funny and I thought, “I tell folks to be their authentic selves, I am all about transparency, so if I preach, am I putting on a show?” I prayed, I hemmed and hawed, I asked a lot of questions. I came to find out that for me, Holy Humor Sunday is exactly what the doctor ordered – a reminder that God is there with us in our sadness and struggle, but also, that God is also the one to share with us that death does not have the last word. In fact, as God defies death, we laugh at evil, knowing that love will always win. So today, wherever you are in your feelings, know that God is there with you in them. Maybe a little laughter might be just what you need too.

I also love that this renewed tradition, sometimes called ‘Bright Sunday’ has been around for a long time. It was celebrated initially by the Greeks who would have picnics and celebrations all week long at the fact that Christ had been resurrected. There are stories in centuries past where this week would be filled with pranks played on one another, jokes shared, and dancing convened. There were even rumors that the pastor or leader would get doused with water like when a coach gets the Gatorade bucket dumped on their head. Now, I’m cool with the first three, but for today, let's skip over the Gatorade bucket, please. But the concept is really cool and some classic theologians write about it – there’s this sense that God has played a practical joke on the devil when Jesus is resurrected and they called it *risus pachalis* or “the Easter laugh.” So, this morning, we join with a whole cloud of witnesses in finding joy.

1. Stories of Laughter

There are so many stories where God’s humor is evident, but

unfortunately, so often, humans have painted God in a very serious light and often portray a God that is vengeful. I’ll give them this – there are times when humans have broken the covenant and God has had to follow through with consequence – that is a reality. I understand that on the surface, it looks bad, but God is a parental figure and a good parent follows through.

I also wonder if folks stoically have come to Scripture because they believe that if you are very serious and strict, you are then respecting God. Perhaps. I paint it a little differently though – you can take your faith seriously, you can believe in God and God’s authority with all your heart, but you can also participate in the joy the laughter that God provides in the Word. So, yes, you can do both – you can love and respect God, but you can also be joyful and laugh with God too. You’re invited to joy and life gets a bit sweeter from that perspective.

1. Stories

With all those disclaimers safely put away, let's look at a few

stories where we see God’s love and laughter eclipse a world in need of some humor. I love this passage from Genesis where Sarah laughs, hidden away, maybe stifling her giggles. Her? Pregnant? At this age? It’s a hot day, she’s in the tent door, and you can almost see God joyfully peeking his head down from the clouds and asks Abraham, “Did I just hear Sarah laugh” and she comes out from the tent, very fearful, and says, “Oh, no, of course not – I wouldn’t laugh.” I can almost see the glimpse of a smile on God – “Yes, yes you did.”

I don’t think God was truly admonishing her for laughing. I think God understood that what he was saying was beyond her comprehension, but I think God takes joy in the moments where God gets to show up and do the impossible. I imagine there’s laughter in both Heaven and Earth.

1. Jonah

The other story I’ve shared today is the story of Jonah. As I

reflected upon this story, I thought about the fact that it is kinda funny that we share this narrative with our children. As adults, we seem to just respect that Jonah is swallowed up and thrown up by a whale. Can you imagine a little child hearing that and thinking, “I don’t want to be in the belly of a whale!” Now, lets leave the politics out of it, I’m not going with cancel culture stuff – but I’m just saying that if you take your little one to the ocean and they get scared – you might want to reassure them that they won’t find themselves in the belly of a whale.

The story itself, is kind of funny on the surface. You have Jonah, who is very much not interested in prophesy and is sticking to his story when he says he won’t go and tell the people about God. I can almost imagine a God who says, “Jonah, think about all of my prophets before you – it’s tough, it works out though, and frankly – you’ve just kinda gotta do this.” But Jonah runs, fearful, but it’s also a little laughable because we know that you can’t really run from God. In a whole myriad of events, Jonah ends up in the belly of the whale for three days before he finally taps on the belly and says, “Okay, just kidding, I’m sorry, I’ll do it.” And right then and there, God has the whale throw up and Jonah finds himself on dry land. We know that Jonah later gets angry, moreso at the folks at Ninevah, but in that moment, as Jonah lies there with gross whale belly stuff on him in the sand, you can imagine him looking up to the Heavens and thinking, “Okay, I get it.” And maybe laughing at what feels wild and absurd.

1. Invite stories to laughter

There are plenty of other stories that invite laughter. For

instance, if anyone tells me about this stoic and serious Jesus, I love to point out this fun fact: Jesus’ first miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding. Jesus is a good time. Yes, of course, he was both God and human, he had to deal with both joy and pain, but don’t dismiss the fact that Jesus must have had some pretty joyful and funny moments in his life and ministry.

In all those miles he walked with the disciples, they must have told stories and laughed. I imagine it might have sounded like a conversation we would have had today, “Oh, man, did you hear what Thomas the Twin’s kid did the other day? That kid is a riot.” Right? Jesus was God, but was with the people, able to laugh.

I had a friend tell me that his favorite story that makes him laugh is one where Jesus walks on water, and then Peter goes ahead and tries to walk on water too, but gets a little afraid of the storm and sinks into the water. Jesus helps Peter up into the boat, but that’s good ole’ Peter for you, faithful and bold, loving and headstrong, and sometimes funny to a fault.

1. Invite Laughter

So, my encouragement to you is not to be afraid to find the

laughter and joy that God gives us in Scripture. There are plenty of other stories that allow you to laugh in unison with God. Yes, take your faith seriously, absolutely, but do not let that seriousness get in the way of a loving and funny, and joyful relationship with God. These stories remind us that God is with us in all of our emotions, from fear, to sadness, to anger, and joy – God has felt it all and will lead us and walk alongside us.

So, go, go and laugh a little bit – and know that the God of all places, people, and time, is laughing with you too. May we praise the God of laughter, light, and love, all the days of our life. Amen.