



## **Holy Humor is Good for the Soul**

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There was a website sponsored by Rotary International that dealt with "Humor, Laughter and Health: Bringing more humor and laughter into our lives." The opening paragraph read, "The sound of roaring laughter is far more contagious than any cough, snuffle, or sneeze. Humor and laughter can cause a domino effect of joy and amusement, as well as set off a number of positive physical effects. Humor and laughter strengthen our immune system and help us recover from illness as well as bring joy into our lives." The question is: How do we gain access to this priceless medicine?

Today I want to share human situations as well as religious events where laughter resulted. Are you ready?

There I stood at the door of a parishioner of the First Presbyterian Church in east Jordan, Michigan. Betty and I were going to visit another member of the church who was in the hospital in Petoskey. After knocking and just before she opened the door, I felt a tug just as my pants began to fall down. I caught them before they got too far and quickly pulled them up. So there I was a little embarrassed while greeting Betty and holding my pants up with my other hand.

I shared with her my predicament and she began to laugh. I also laughed. When we got to Petoskey, we made a quick stop at Wal-Mart so I could buy a new belt. The rest of the trip was filled with chuckles and smiles. And yes, Betty had to say something to the member who was in the hospital.

Yes, laughter is important in life. Even pastors have a few stories and jokes to tell.

One pastor shared with me how he was leading a funeral procession toward the grave site up a hill during a heavy downpour. As he got close to the plot, his muddy shoes made him slip on the green artificial grass that was around the grave site. All he remembers is the quick falling movement of his body and then staring up at faces looking down at him as he lay on his back at the bottom of the hole. This is true! He quickly scrambled out of the hole with help from the people and was greeted with much laughter. The service took on a different tone as people cried, laughed, and chuckled.

Jesus played the biggest joke on Satan by defeating death and being raised from the dead. In the book *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*, William j. Bausch shares: "in the Greek Orthodox tradition, the day after Easter was devoted to telling jokes. . . . They felt they were imitating the cosmic joke that God pulled on Satan in the resurrection. Satan thought he had won, and was smug in his victory, smiling to himself, having the last word. So he thought. Then God raised Jesus from the dead, and life and salvation became the last words."

For us, laughing on a regular basis benefits our health according to some research. A study done at the University of Maryland Medical Center suggests that a good sense of humor and the ability to laugh at stressful situations helps lessen the damaging physical effects of distressing emotions.

This study states that "Laughter activates the chemistry of the will to live and increases our capacity to fight disease. Laughing relaxes the body and reduces problems associated with high blood pressure, strokes, arthritis, and ulcers. Some other research suggests that laughter may also reduce the risk of heart disease. Historically, research has shown that distressing emotions such as depression, anger, anxiety, and stress are all related to heart disease.

"So, a good hearty laugh can help: reduce stress, lower blood pressure, elevate mood, boost immune system, improve brain functioning, protect the heart, connect you to others, foster instant relaxation, or make you feel good."  
[[http://www.helpguide.org/life/humor\\_laughter\\_health.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/life/humor_laughter_health.htm)]

The Old Testament lesson for today tells the story of Abraham and Sarah. But first we have to go back a chapter to another event where God initially approached Abraham about the promise of a child.

Genesis chapter 17, verses 15-17 reads, **<sup>15</sup>God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. <sup>16</sup>I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." <sup>17</sup>Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"**

The intent of God's promises to Abraham and Sarah are for a great nation and the gift of a child who will lead them into the future. No doubt Abraham thought the idea of his 90-year-old wife conceiving a child was absurd. He was probably taken aback by what was intended for Sarah especially by what he needed to do as a 100-year-old husband. He fell to the ground and laughed at the thought of these two old people having a child at their age.

Of course, Abraham didn't tell Sarah about the gift she would receive until the three heavenly visitors came to see them later.

The story in Genesis 18 tells of the exchange with the three visitors with Abraham. The story goes that **<sup>1</sup>The Lord appeared to Abraham by the Oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day.** He then went to prepare a meal for the three to enjoy in his tent.

The conversation then turned to Sarah and her whereabouts. **<sup>9</sup>They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." <sup>10</sup>then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son."** Of course, Sarah "was listening at the tent entrance

behind him.” Her thoughts were that <sup>11</sup>**Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.** <sup>12</sup>**So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?”** God heard Sarah laugh and **“said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ <sup>14</sup>Is anything too wonderful for the lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.” <sup>15</sup>But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.”** God heard Sarah laugh and challenged her.

The story continues later in Genesis chapter 21, verses 1-7 where God blessed Sarah and she conceived a son named Isaac. With this child, Sarah and Abraham were delighted. The joy Isaac brought to them is celebrated in Sarah’s words, **“God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.” <sup>7</sup>And she said, “Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”**

The promise from God was fulfilled as Abraham and Sarah were blessed in the joy of a son. Out of their laughter, they gained a son who bore the name Isaac, which means “The one who laughs”. They had been blessed!

The Psalmist writes in Psalm 126 about joy that one reaps when in the trials and restoration of life. This song of harvest reflects God’s restorative nature of the faithful. The Psalm says, **<sup>1</sup>When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. <sup>2</sup> 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.” <sup>3</sup> The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. <sup>4</sup>Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negev. <sup>5</sup> May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.**

Laughter and joy abound in the restoring power of God as well as through Christ.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, God gave us the ability to laugh. The remarkable gifts God gave to us are ones we can celebrate. Even though scripture doesn’t say much about laughter, it does mention a lot about joy, excitement and good cheer. So may we enjoy a good laugh and receive some wonderful benefits from its usage in life.

A pastor friend of mine back in Kansas City, whenever he said to goodbye to someone he would say. “Be of good cheer. Be of good cheer!”

Well I close with another story that I shared with a colleague who happened to be a Catholic priest.

The Pope dies and, naturally, goes to heaven. He's met by the reception committee and, after a whirlwind tour is told that he can enjoy any of the myriad recreations available.

He decides that he wants to read all of the ancient original text of the Holy Scriptures, and spends the next eon or so learning the languages. After becoming a linguistics master, he sits down in the library and begins to pore over every version of the bible, working back from the most recent "easy reading" to the original script.

All of a sudden there is a scream in the library. The angels come running to him, only to find the Pope huddled in a chair, crying to himself, and muttering, "An 'R! They left out the 'R'".

God takes him aside, offering comfort and asks him what the problem is. After collecting his wits, the Pope sobs again, "It's the letter 'R'... The word was supposed to be celebrate"

Well, that Catholic priest was roaring with laughter just as much as you.

So my friends, let us Be of good cheer. Live our life according to Christ and to celebrate the risen Lord in our lives every day. Be of good cheer.

Let us pray: Dear God, thank you for the ability to laugh and find humor in life. Help us to overcome the doldrums of life with the joy of laughter that heals the mind, body and spirit. Thank you for loving us so much that we can celebrate with joyful hearts. We ask all this in the name of the One who is our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Supporting Scriptures:

Genesis 18:1-15 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup>He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. <sup>3</sup>He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. <sup>4</sup>Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. <sup>5</sup>Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." <sup>6</sup>And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." <sup>7</sup>Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup>Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

<sup>9</sup>They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent."

<sup>10</sup>Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him.

<sup>11</sup>Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. <sup>12</sup>So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" <sup>13</sup>The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' <sup>14</sup>Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." <sup>15</sup>But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

Psalm 126:1-6

A Harvest of Joy A Song of Ascents.

<sup>1</sup> When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dream.

<sup>2</sup> 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.'

<sup>3</sup> The LORD has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.

<sup>4</sup> Restore our fortunes, O LORD,  
like the watercourses in the Negeb.

<sup>5</sup> May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.

<sup>6</sup> Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.

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