

THE ULTIMATE GIFT

17th October 2021

HillSide's Minister – Rev' Allan Booth

WEEK 7 - LAUGHTER

Blurb:

Laughter is the key to sanity. It can renew and refresh our souls; restore relationships and transform difficult situations. Sharing laughter with others connects and binds us in the love of God.

John 1: 45-50 NIV

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

⁴⁶ "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

⁴⁸ "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

⁵⁰ Jesus said, "You believe^[a] because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that."

Phil 4: 4-9

Final Exhortations

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Sermon

To my mind this is one of the best gifts we can ever unwrap; laughter keeps us sane. Of course, it is true that manic laughter is a sign of being radically insane.... But today we are talking about a good old belly wobbling laugh out loud expression of delight. Laughter stems from having a healthy sense of humour, blended with a healthy sense of humility. I believe God wants everyone to be happy, so we have been given the ability to laugh at ourselves and our mistakes. Surely this is one of the foundational building blocks of relationships? Ask any person who has been married a long time, humour gives longevity to relationship.

Almost every person in the Hellenistic world knows the alleged shortest verse in the Bible as being 'Jesus wept'. The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is a time to weep and a time to laugh...so if we really search scripture, will we find Jesus laughed?

No, no we won't, well not as a verse. However, there is plenty of evidence of Jesus' humour... remember Matthew records for us in 11: 18,19 that John came neither eating or drinking and the Pharisees claimed he had a demon, but Jesus ate and drank with anybody so he was said to be a glutton and a drunkard. Now whatever you choose to draw from that comparison we must accept on that evidence, Jesus must have been a fun-loving guy, popular at parties. A strong inference that he had a great sense of humour and laughed a lot; nobody likes to hang out with a grouch!

Possibly the easiest example of his wit is the speck and the plank... of course it is ludicrous to think of having a plank in your eye; even more so to be trying to remove a speck of sawdust from someone else's eye, with a plank in yours. The first hearers would have laughed out loud. What about the camel and the eye of a needle? Absurd exaggerated humour, without doubt! Then let's not forget that he also told us that followers of Jesus who don't evangelize are about as useful to the kingdom as a house fire! (Mk 4:21'Do you bring in a lamp and put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead don't you put it on it's stand?') Remember that Jesus is a part of the holy trinity one with God and the Holy Spirit; Psalm 2:4 shows God's reaction to those who arrogantly decide they don't need him anymore, they think they are stronger than God, God laughs at them and scoffs at their pretensions. Imagine a 4year old challenging Arjun Bhullar the world MMA champ to a fight!

The exchange with Nathanael is an example of Jesus quick wit... here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false. Is a rather bible writer/ academic way of saying, hey at last someone I can trust to be honest!

Why then does the world think Jesus was ever so serious, always having a holy glow about him and never cracking a smile? As if there wasn't a chicken-licken in Jerusalem? Jesus has been falsely sanitized over the centuries, and we have lost the original context of his humour. How can we in the 21st century assume to know the subtleties of every day life in 1st century Jerusalem? If I were to watch a Russian comedy, I would most likely not catch a single joke. Nevertheless, I am willing to bet that if a producer were to make a movie focusing on Jesus's humour there would be greater controversy than the da Vinci Code.

So is it okay for a follower of Jesus to enjoy the gift of laughter. I would say it is absolutely essential for any child of the living God to fully engage their sense of humour. So long as we remember that humour is a mirror in which our authentic self is reflected. Rejoice at all times, again I say rejoice! Give thanks to Jesus for your ability to laugh; but be ever wary of the counterfeit who opposes God and uses laughter to mock and destroy.

We are called to live abundant lives of great joy... Whatever is going on in our lives family, personally, or corporately; how about we promise ourselves this week to laugh out loud at least once a day? Let's properly unwrap the gift of laughter!