

**Date: Sunday April 11, 2010**

**Scripture: Luke 6:20-23a**

**Title: "The Naked Church"**

**The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): Laughter will come to all.**

**The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): It is good news to be able to stand before God and know that we have lived life to its fullest sharing all we have been blessed with, including the gift of humor.**

**(Remember, it's all about God!)**

A woman brought a very limp duck into a veterinarian. As she laid her pet duck on the table, the vet pulled out his stethoscope and listened to the bird's chest. Moments later he said, "I'm sorry, but your duck has passed away." The distressed woman was overcome with grief. "Are you sure," she cried? "Yes, your duck is very dead," replied the vet. "Now wait it minute," said the woman. "How can you be so sure? You have not done any testing. He might just be in a coma or something." The vet listened, told the lady to wait, and then left the room. When he returned he had a Black Labrador Retriever with him. As the duck's owner looked on, the dog stood on his hind legs, put his front paws on the examination table, and sniffed the duck from top to bottom. The dog looked at the vet with sad eyes and shook his head. The vet petted the dog and led him out of the room.

In a few minutes the vet returned to the examination room with a cat. The cat immediately jumped on the table and delicately sniffed the bird from head to foot. The cat then sat back, shook its head and meowed softly. The vet lifted the

cat off the table and took it out of the room. The vet then came back and said to the woman, “It is as I told you originally. Your duck is dead.” He then turned to the computer terminal, punched a few buttons, and the printer rapidly produced a bill. The vet gave the bill to the woman. The woman looked at it and shrieked, “\$150! You are charging me \$150 just to tell me my duck is dead!” “Oh no,” said, the vet, for me to tell you your duck is dead is only \$20. But with the lab report and the cat scan, it’s now \$150” (Bales, email).

That story, with its life and death theme, is loosely connected to the rest of today’s message. But the main reason I share it is for the humor and after all we have been through with health care these past months, I thought it might be a good time to laugh about health care.

Something else we can laugh about is the naked church. Have you heard about this? There was a report on the news in the last weeks about a church that holds worship services in the nude. Everybody is naked. I suppose clothing is optional. I hope it is an “everyone is welcome church.” But for the most part, everyone is nude. Now, we might try new things here at Immanuel. But we are not going to get naked.

One idea I did take away from the story about the naked church was to think about how it can be good to go about our lives in ways different from the norm. And connecting with Holy Humor Sunday, and going about worship in a slightly different way, the idea of the naked church got me to thinking about the benefit of living some of our normal daily routines in a more humorous, maybe even silly

manner.

Robert Fulghum writes about this approach in his book, “Uh-Oh.” He writes about a Friday morning when he started the fire in his stove using the comics. In the shower, he drew all over his body with Silly Soap left behind by his granddaughter. For breakfast he had Cheerios topped with jelly beans and a glass of fizzy grape juice made just for kids. Instead of listening to the morning news report, he put in a disc of Woody Allen’s comedy monologues. As he headed out the door to go to his office, he decided to walk – a considerable distance. He noticed his granddaughter’s red and white beanie with the propeller on top of it hanging on the chair by the door. He decided to wear it and to see how fast he would have to walk in order to get the propeller to spin. He got it spinning. People shouted from their cars, “Go get’ em Grandpa!”

Robert had had a bad week. There was a ton of unfinished business. There was increasing grumpiness. And after going to bed on that Thursday night feeling completely out of sorts, he decided to make Friday a different kind of day. Under the same conditions in times past he might have played hooky, making up an excuse for missing work. But now he was self employed. If he called in sick he knew the boss would know he was lying. So no radical moves. Just some minor course adjustments to make what could be a bad day much better (Fulghum). Robert put humor to really good use.

Allen Klein takes this concept of putting humor to good use to a whole other level. He calls himself a “Jollytologist.” Doesn’t that sound fun? Allen’s unusual

career began shortly after his wife died of a rare liver disease. Allen started to explore the role that humor played in how they dealt with the disease and now how he would live grieving his wife's death. He doesn't advocate that humor should cover up death. It is important that we properly grieve when a loved one dies. Still, he knows from personal experience that funny things happen in the midst of life and death, and Allen makes it a point to lift up the humorous.

Allen is convinced that his friend Rick lived so long with AIDS because of Rick's sense of humor. Every year Rick would throw himself a birthday party and every year he would poke fun at the fact he was still alive. One year the invitation read, "Rick's Fourth Annual Last Birthday Party." And he made it to the fifth last birthday party. Allen likes to use a quote from George Bernard Shaw who said, "Life does not cease to be funny when someone dies anymore than it ceases to be serious when someone laughs" (Klein). From his personal experiences, Allen promotes the healthy benefits of laughter.

It is often said that laughter is the best medicine and there is growing talk in medical circles of laugh therapy. It is scientifically proven that when we laugh we release endorphins which are the body's natural healing enzymes. We most often hear about endorphins being released and the associated natural high that comes with that when someone works out. But endorphins can also be released from singing, hugging, eating chocolate, and, yes, laughing. Humor has a positive effect on our mental, physical, and spiritual beings.

William Willimon writes in his book, *The Laugh Shall Be First* that among

all of God's creatures, human beings are the only ones who both laugh and weep. We are the only animals who know the difference between the way things are and the way things ought to be. When we are stuck in the incongruence of the world, humor results. A stern, smug gentleman slips on a banana peel and ends up sprawled on the sidewalk. We can laugh. A man throws a pie in to the face of a beautiful, well-dressed woman. We can laugh. Humor is a wonderful way of holding up a mirror to ourselves, to see ourselves and our many frailties, and we can laugh at ourselves (fccoshkosh.org). Humor is one of God's greatest gifts.

Fred's hospital bed is surrounded by a group of family and friends. Suddenly Fred motions frantically to the pastor indicating he wants to write a note. The pastor hands Fred a piece of paper and a pen. Using all the energy he can muster, Fred writes a note and then within just a few moments Fred passes away.

The pastor had taken the paper from Fred but with everything else that transpired so quickly had just stuck the note in his pocket without reading it. Three days later, prior to Fred's funeral, the pastor found the note in the same jacket he had on at the hospital. He decided he would share the note during the service.

Nearing the end of his sermon, the pastor said, "Fred handed me a note in his hospital room. I have not read it, but wanted to share it with all of you today. Knowing Fred, I'm sure he had something insightful, honest, and probably even humorous to say.

Opening the note, the pastor reads, "Help! You are standing on my oxygen

hose!” (Dyck).

The well-known author, the late Erma Bomebeck, also had insightful, honest, and humorous thoughts to share. She wrote in her column in March of 1987 about a dream she had. She writes, “I always had a dream that when I am asked to give an accounting of my life to a higher court, it will go like this: ‘So, empty your pockets. What have you got left of your life? Any dreams that were unfulfilled? Any unused talent that we gave you when you were born that you still have left? Any unsaid compliments or bits of love [or laughter] that you haven’t spread around?’” Erma says that she will answer, “I have nothing to return. I spent everything you gave me. I’m [standing before you] as naked as the day I was born” (Bomebeck).

Sounds like good news doesn’t it? We get to, we are expected to, use up all God has blessed us with, and that includes the gift of humor, especially the gift of humor, and when we use it all we can stand confident and naked before God knowing we have done all we can do with this gift of human life. You know, maybe naked is not so bad after all. But we’re still not going to do it at Immanuel. Let us pray.

Lord,

As we are before you this day, we contemplate all the ways we have been blessed and how we can share your blessings. In life and in death, in times of happiness and sadness, you are with us and for that we offer our praise, our gratefulness, and our joy. In the name of the resurrected one, we pray, Amen.

Offering: Story about change at the fast food restaurant.

Dedication: Lord, we seek to share all that you have blessed us with, not only money, but qualities and characteristics as well. So we pray, Amen.

Benediction: I'm gonna work, pray, sing, and laugh – sounds like really good ways to live for the Lord. Let us go forth and do so. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

Bales, Julie; email; "Your Duck is Dead"; March 2010.

Bomeback, Erma; "Forever Erma";

Dyck, Drew; "Let My People Laugh"; Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN; 2009.

Klein, Allen; "Humor and Death: The Lighter Side of Loss"; [www.allenklein.com](http://www.allenklein.com); 2010.

Fulghum, Robert; "Uh-Oh"; Ivy Books: New York, NY; 1991.

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