

A Time to Laugh

First Congregational Church, Branford

July 28, 2019

Genesis 21:6; Job 8:21; Psalm 126:2; Ecclesiastes 3:4, Luke 6:21; James 5:13

Rev. Suzanne Personette

From Genesis: ⁶Sarah said, ‘God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.’

From Job: He will yet fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouts of joy.

From Psalm 126: Our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joy.

From Ecclesiastes: There’s a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

From Luke: ¹“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

And, from James: Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise.

The laughter of God for the people of God.

Ha - ha – ha... Ho - ho – ho... - And a couple of tra - la – las...

That's how we laugh the day away... In the Merry Old Land of Oz!...

Bzz - bzz – bzz... Chirp - chirp – chirp... - And a couple of La - di – das...

That's how the crickets crick all day... In the Merry Old Land of Oz!...

It is a time to laugh, First Congregational! Ha-ha-ha.... Ho-ho-ho... - and a couple of tra-la-las...

I remember a funny thing that happened in 1998. I was in my home office in Indianapolis, in the midst of writing the sermon for the week, and at 11 am I heard a voice say, “Go see the movie, ‘Patch Adams.’” I thought, well, that seems strange, so I dismissed it, but the voice kept coming and GOT LOUDER. To get the voice to *be quiet*, I said, “I’ll go on Monday, my day

off!” The voice kept on. So, I went downstairs to see when it would be showing that afternoon. 12:10. I thought, “Okay, I’ll play hooky and go.”

Patch Adams is a movie with Robin Williams, based on the true story of a man who was determined to become a medical doctor because he enjoys helping people. He ventured where no doctor had ventured before, using humor and pathos.

Dr. Adams is now 74. He travels around the globe lecturing about his medicine methods.

I laughed and cried throughout the movie, as it spoke to what I believe about life and healing. Much of Patch’s early life had been steeped in depression. He’d tried to commit suicide a few times. The movie opens with him admitting himself into a psychiatric ward. It was there that he discovered his gifts for humor and laughter - *he was able to do far more for the patients than the doctors could!*

He entered medical school, and sought to integrate humor and healing. His roommate was a real stuffed shirt who confronted him one day, “You’re never serious.” Patch paused and said, “No. I tried that for years. It never worked for me.” Woo. I think when we’re so serious we can let life swallow us whole. Which is why I feel *so grateful* for comedians who seem to have a handle on this funny thing called life. Thank you to and for our clowns.

The day after the movie I knew I’d be going to see a parishioner named Joanne at a psychiatric pavilion in the hospital. But, I first stopped at a party store. I wanted to see if there was anything I could use for an upcoming church retreat worship service. It was to be a joyful retreat, and I wanted the worship to match. I’d shared with that parishioner’s daughter about Patch Adams, and suggested she get a red nose to put on for a visit with her mother, to which she said, *no thank you*. I didn’t think that I could get away with it - I didn’t see myself as very funny. But, at the party store, I saw the clown nose and shoes in the store for the retreat, picked up a wig elsewhere, and decided I’d first dress up for Joanne. My visits with her had been very difficult. She was an extremely depressed person. When I’d leave her, I’d feel depleted - probably because I thought God and I together could fix a depressed person! We think it’s easy to fix chemical depression! It’s not! It’s not!

On the drive there I suddenly took the red nose out of its bag (**put on**) and put it on my nose, and within seconds, a truck driver looked over and gave me the biggest smile! I was beaming. And, I thought, I did that. I’m responsible for that smile. I spread some joy on the Indianapolis highway. I didn’t have to work at it, didn’t have to say anything, didn’t have to try to be funny - the nose

was enough. I was excited! I walked into the hospital with some fear, and went into the restroom to transform myself (**put on wig, shoes**). I came out and all of these people were smiling. They were so happy. I didn't DO anything.

When I saw Joanne, she laughed, and then our conversation went deeper than it had gone before. The laughter opened something up in her. The clown allowed her to express herself differently. *And*, I was able to poke fun at her through some of the stuff she said. We laughed about it, we laughed about her depression, and over some of the serious things she said. And, I felt lighter, like I was carrying less of the burden. When I left her, I felt free, and whole.

Was that God or what?

At that time I was also teaching the classroom portion of field education at Christian Theological Seminary, and that particular week I walked through those oh so sober, serious, academic seminary halls in my new garb. It felt great to poke fun at all of it! Everybody responded positively, and class was great fun.

I named the clown Ida. I lost her somewhere along the way. (**take off nose & wig**) I think I felt too shy for her, or decided *I'd rather be serious*. I don't know. But, Ida understands that to give God's people a reason to smile is really like salvation!

I know it may not seem like a time to smile or laugh - there are serious things happening in the world, and in each of our lives. We may just want to cry or put the covers over our head!

But, Ecclesiastes liked to talk about living in the moment, enjoying the life that you've been given, *all these days under the sun*. To not just toil and sweat, to not just weep and mourn.

For First Congregational, it's an exciting time in the life of the congregation, and I'm so happy for you, happy as the Search Committee develops a church profile for searching ministers to see (please don't make it too serious!); and the church will soon undergo a new governance. This is a time of wondrous possibilities here at First Congregational.

I think it's *time to laugh*, I think it's okay to laugh.

God has been so good to us.

In light of our scriptures today, *laughter* may very well be the greatest expression of *faith*. It means that you're not going to spend your precious minutes of life worrying – that you're going to *trust* that God is in the world, at work, and knows better than we how to handle everything that comes. God is **ALWAYS** saying, *the light is shining, Johnny Jones; yes, even in the darkness, Daisy Mae*. To be sure, there is great suffering, things may look very bleak

indeed, but the Bible teaches to not put your trust in what you *see*. *Walk by faith, not by sight*.

Whatever you've got going on, whatever has you scared, or beaten down, try, in the week ahead, not to not focus on *it*. Jesus said, *seek God first*. Place it in God's hands, and *go have some fun*. We think worrying about what befalls us is the appropriate response, *but it's not*. It's time to exercise our faith and laughter.

There is most certainly a time to weep; but, maybe there are more times when we're called to laugh.

I remember when my son, Abe, lost a tooth, and the next morning, filled with joy, he showed us what the tooth fairy left for him. Then, he said, *the next time I lose a tooth, I'm going to do an experiment and put it in a glass of sugar water and see if I can make a cavity*.

Go, do your experiments with enjoyment, for God has long ago approved of what you do. Enjoy life all the days of your life that are given you under the sun.

Now's the time for jokes - anybody have one? **(put on nose, hand out other nose)**

(~ ...Congregation tells several funny jokes! Woo-Hoo!... ~)

Okay, I'm going to tell some, too:

Reporter interviewing a 104-year-old woman:

'And what do you think is the best thing about being 104?' the reporter asked. She simply replied, 'No peer pressure.'

Three buildings in town were overrun by squirrels—the town hall, the hardware store, and the church.

The town hall brought in some cats. But after they tore up all the files, the mayor got rid of the predators, and soon the squirrels were back.

The hardware store humanely trapped the squirrels and set them free outside of town. But three days later, the squirrels climbed back in.

Only the church came up with an effective solution. They baptized the squirrels and made them members. Now they see them only on Christmas and Easter.

On the Sunday before Christmas, a reverend was walking down a street on his way to see a parishioner. However, he wanted to post a parcel urgently so he asked a young boy where he could find the post office. When the boy had

directed him, the reverend thanked him and said, 'If you'll come to the Church this evening, you can hear me telling everyone how to get to heaven.'

The boy replied, 'I think I'll give your sermon a miss. If you don't even know your way to the post office, how will you lead me to heaven?'

It was Christmas and the judge was in a merry mood as he asked the prisoner, "What are you charged with?"

"Doing my Christmas shopping early," replied the defendant.

"That's no offense," said the judge. "How early were you doing this shopping?"

"Before the store opened."

Always Remember This:

You don't stop laughing because you grow old,

You grow old because you stop laughing!!!

When you're tempted to worry, doubt, fear, weep, try to consider that it just might be *a time to laugh*. Watch a funny movie, call a funny friend, go to a comedy show. Ha ha ha... Ho ho ho... and a couple of tra la las... That's how we laugh the day away... in the merry old land of First Congregational. Amen.

from the bulletin:

Gathering Prayer (unison) A Clown's Prayer ~ Anonymous

As I stumble through this life, help me to create more laughter than tears, dispense more cheer than gloom, spread more cheer than despair. Never let me become so indifferent, that I will fail to see the wonders in the eyes of a child, or the twinkle in the eyes of the aged. Never let me forget that my total effort is to cheer people, make them happy, and forget momentarily, all the unpleasantness in their lives. And in my final moment, may I hear You whisper: "When you made My people smile, you made Me smile."

Amen.