

YOU'D LAUGH, TOO!

Haslett Community Church

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By Carol Ingells

In the early 50's, when I was a little girl, "Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries" was a very popular song. Its basic theme was not to worry, to hold lightly to life's challenges, to "live, love and laugh at it all." My father ranted and raved about that song and the evils of its philosophy. "That's the trouble with people these days," he would roar, "they don't take life seriously. They don't work hard enough", etc, etc, etc. Ironically, by the way, a few years later he bought a cherry orchard, so "a bowl of cherries" became pretty significant to him.

Why did that song upset him so much? He came from a family of stoic Scots-Irish people--poor, puritanical, pious. He told how his father berated him and his brother for tossing a football after the day's work was done as just a waste of time. There was little laughter in that home. And, though my Dad was somewhat "looser", there was precious little laughter in our home either. Fortunately for him, and my mother, in later years he allowed his natural exuberance to come forth and his deep belly laugh was loud and contagious.

Laughter is one of the amazing things about the human species. Perhaps other species laugh, too. I hope so. Dogs and cats definitely smile. But there is nothing quite like the pure joy of a hearty laugh. On lovely summer days, I revel in the exuberant giggles of the two small children who live next door.

Christianity, however, doesn't say a lot about laughter. We read that Jesus wept, but not that Jesus laughed. A strange detail to leave out, don't you think? Especially when you consider all the wild parties he liked to attend. Perhaps you've seen the pictures of Jesus laughing. If you Google that phrase on your computer you come up with an amazing number of articles and pictures.

So getting back to Sarah and Abraham, the father and mother of the Hebrew people, it's interesting that laughter was a focus of this story. You may remember that God has promised Abraham he will be the father of countless people and now three strangers appear in the yard and somehow Abraham senses their significance, for he jumps up in the hottest part of the day and can't wait to provide them with food and gracious hospitality.

So Sarah hears one of the men, presumably the Lord, saying she will have a baby and she laughs. Can't you just hear her? HA! Me? At age 90? Have pleasure with that 100 year old husband of mine? HA! You'd have laughed, too. Interestingly, when God tells Abraham the same thing one chapter earlier, he, too, laughs, but God doesn't seem to mind. Why then, do you suppose God is annoyed with Sarah for laughing? Might say something about how the story-teller saw women. Apparently, she wasn't supposed to laugh at God. Maybe that's part of how we learned it was wrong to laugh in church or any holy setting.

I have several friends who became parents at an older age (not THAT old) and they laugh, too, sometimes to keep from crying. We laugh at that which we both understand and don't understand. We laugh at absurdity. We laugh when we can do nothing else.

Ted Cohen's book [Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters](#) was reviewed in *The Christian Century* a few years ago.

"The peculiar capacity of jokes to absorb absurdity is theologically significant, Cohen suggests. To laugh at the world's absurdities implies an "acceptance of incomprehensibility," and this acceptance is a kind of religious affirmation. Such jokes offer a way of being reconciled to the creation and the Creator even as one expresses anger or despair at God's world. Cohen finds such laughter in the passage in Genesis where Abraham and Sarah laugh upon learning that Sarah at age 90 will bear a child (to be named Isaac, "he laughs"). If the patriarch and matriarch of the faith can laugh at God's incomprehensible ways, argues Cohen, then surely such laughter has a theological warrant. *Ted Cohen, Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters, reviewed in The Christian Century, Aug. 9, 2003*

Of course laughter can come from all kinds of sources—fear, embarrassment, nervousness, hatred, abuse of power, etc. But this morning, I hope to bring some laughter, or at least a chuckle or grin to your spirit by sharing a few things that just coincidentally showed up in my email this week. You'll need to be wide awake now!

The first set is from a comedian named Stephen Wright, who is zany, creative and a bit outside the box. Here are a few of his one-liners:

82.7% of all statistics are made up on the spot.

A clear conscience is usually the sign of a bad memory.

How do you tell when you're out of invisible ink?

Depression is merely anger without enthusiasm.

When everything is coming your way, you're in the wrong lane.

What happens if you get scared half to death twice?

The hardness of the butter is proportional to the softness of the bread.

There's a fine line between fishing and just standing on the shore like an idiot.

Then there are the ubiquitous church bulletin mistakes, such as:

- The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.
- The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been canceled due to a conflict.
- Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.
- Potluck supper Sunday at 5:00 PM - prayer and medication to follow.
- Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 PM. Please use the back door.
- Weight Watchers will meet at 7 PM at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.

Humorists can do much to help us find commonality and community, perhaps when we least expect it. I believe Bill Cosby's ability to show how similar his experiences were to

that of people of all ethnic backgrounds went a long way in teaching Americans to be more tolerant. We know, too, that laughter is healing, physically and every other way. Norman Cousins, who laughed his way to healing, says, "Laughter is inner jogging."

God has a sense of humor, obviously. Else why would life be so wild and crazy and rich and wonderful? I was blessed to marry a man who believed that; a man who said we could survive anything if we could keep our sense of humor. Our home knew laughter even in the hardest times. In my email signature I quote, I don't know who, "Blessed are those who laugh at themselves, for they shall never cease to be amused."

I will close with a prayer from Bridget Mary Meehan's book Praying with the Women of the Bible:

Promise us, O God of Sarah, that you will be faithful forever

especially in the times we experience discouragement and emptiness.

O God of the Unexpected, teach us to laugh heartily at life's inconsistencies and at our own silly pretenses.

Surprise us, as you did Sarah, with new life, fresh hope, and energetic love.

Then, like Sarah, we will praise you with glad hearts and grateful laughter all the days of our lives.

Amen.