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***“LAUGHING OUR WAY THROUGH LIFE!”***

**Scriptures:** Genesis 18:1-15

The Rev. Dr. Jo H. Campe

The Recovery Church

I want you to know ahead of time that if you don't at least chuckle at some point in this sermon you need to get a grip on life and on the theology of laughter! As most of you know, I think it is important to get a reaction out of the congregation. Even a groan is better than falling asleep.

I don't play golf often; I am absolutely no good at it. Back in my drinking days, golf was a simple matter of finishing the course before the bottle or beer ran out in the cooler in the golf cart

There are two other people I know of that really enjoy the game of golf. Randy woke up Sunday morning and realizing it was an exceptionally beautiful and sunny early spring day, decided he just had to play golf. So... even though he had told his local church that he would help with communion and assume his usual seat, he snuck out of where he lived before anyone could notice he was gone.

Randy headed out of town to a golf course about forty miles away. This way he knew he wouldn't accidentally meet anyone he knew from his Church. Setting up on the first tee, he was alone. After all, it was Sunday morning and everyone else was in church!

At about this time, Saint Peter leaned over to the Lord while looking down from the heavens and exclaimed, **'You're not going to let him get away with this, are you?'**

The Lord sighed, and said, **“No, I won't. Just watch!”**

Just then Randy hit the ball and it shot straight toward the pin, dropping just short of it, rolled up and fell into the hole. **IT WAS A 420 YARD HOLE IN ONE!**

St. Peter was astonished. He looked at the Lord and asked, **“Why did you let him do that? I thought you weren't going to let him get away with this!?”**

The Lord smiled and replied, **“Who's he going to tell?”**

And then there is John, a guy in our congregation who is an avid golfer. He played golf every chance he got; in the rain, in the cold, he even used black balls to play when there was snow on the ground.

His girlfriend joked, half in jest that she was a golf widow and she really wouldn't miss John all that much if he died before her, for he was never around anyhow. He spent all his spare money on golf items and gadgets; trick exploding balls, tees with no indentation on the top so the golf ball would roll off it, towels with witty golf sayings on them and all kinds of golf hats.

One night he was in bed asleep after having played 36-holes of golf that day. He was tired but he dreamed of replaying the whole round. Suddenly his dream was interrupted by the appearance of an angel. It was an angel like he had seen in Bible drawings and other art work depicting angels. He was instantly awake.

The angel, with a full set of wings and wearing a long flowing white robe, stood at the foot of his bed. **"John,"** the angel said.

**"Yes, what is it? You are an angel, aren't you?"** John asked.

**"Of course I'm an angel. In fact, I'm your guardian angel,"** the angel replied.

**"Does that mean I get three wishes?"** John asked.

**"No, I'm a guardian angel not a genie,"** the heavenly being answered. **"As you know, John, you're getting on in years and you don't have as much time left on earth as you once did. Although I can't grant wishes for you, I can answer questions you might have about the hereafter. You do believe in the hereafter, don't you, John?"**

**"Oh yes and I've been good, with maybe the possible exception of having played too much golf in my lifetime,"** John replied.

**"Playing golf is like going fishing,"** replied the angel. **"There is no such thing as playing too much golf or going fishing too often. Do you have any questions about heaven?"**

**"As a matter of fact, I do,"** answered John. **"I've often wondered if there are any golf courses in heaven. Can you answer that question for me?"**

**"John, no one has ever asked me that question before. I'll have to go back and check on it. Go back to sleep and I'll be back in about 20 minutes."** With that, the angel disappeared. John rubbed his eyes and opened them again. The angel was gone and John wondered if he had just had a weird dream. He rolled over on his side and was soon snoring softly again.

True to his word, the angel reappeared within 20 minutes. **"John,"** the angel called. John woke up to see the angel again standing at the foot of his bed. **"Oh, you're back."**

**“Yes, John, I'm back and I have the answer to your question. But before I tell you, I have to advise that the answer is in two parts, good news and bad news. Which do you want first, the good news or the bad news?”**

**“Oh dear, I suppose give me the good news first,”** responded John.

**“Okay, the good news is there are golf courses in heaven. Bobby Jones, Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus have designed all the courses. There are no greens fees and electric carts are provided at no charge. You have the choice of any brand of clubs you desire. Each course has 36-holes. The greens are always freshly mowed, the sand traps freshly raked, the roughs aren't too high and you never lose a ball in the water for the balls float. When you hit a ball into the woods they always ricochet back into the middle of the fairway. And on every par three hole you will score a hole-in-one. Yes, you will have a wonderful time playing golf in heaven.”**

**“Oh, that sounds wonderful. With all that good news what could the bad news possibly be?”** John wondered aloud.

**“The bad news is you have a nine o'clock tee time tomorrow morning.”**

Isn't it good to chuckle in church? I think one of the best signs of emotional health is the ability to laugh at ourselves. Our life is falling apart, we've lost everything, and we gather together with our friends in a recovery meeting and laugh at our own stupidity and call it healthy. And yet, we wouldn't think of doing the same thing in church...we call that inappropriate. We make judgments about church that we wouldn't think about doing in our recovery...

Because humor is tied so closely with everything that is important in life; it has a religious dimension. Humor reflects the tension between our professed ideals and our behavior, the disparity between our vision of ourselves and who we actually are. Great humor is based upon the natural contradictions, the real and everyday conflicts which are part of human nature itself. For while our minds explore the mysteries of the universe, our bodies are firmly attached to earth. While our souls explore the nature of God, or the meaning of life and death, we are engaged in such basic necessities as eating, sleeping and the like. Life is full of embarrassing reminders that while we are only a little lower than the angels, we are also only a little higher than the worm.

But in the best of humor we learn to laugh at ourselves. For while it's perfectly human to deride ones enemies, it's divine to see the humor in oneself. One of the very first steps on the road to salvation is learning to laugh at one's own mistakes. Only when we are in touch with our own flaws can we truly open ourselves to the saving power of God.

Consider the dog Snoopy in Peanuts. Snoopy is an incurable dancer. Even when Linus and Lucy stand on the sidelines yelling, “EARTHQUAKE! WIND! FIRE!” trying to get his attention and disrupt the dance. Still Snoopy keeps on dancing. For he knows that to dance is to live. Snoopy is, in this respect, the very incarnation of faith. To be aware and fully alive in this world requires a deep sense of humor, for without it one loses the ability to dance, to have hope, or to engage in any meaningful activity.

That's why the Italian poet Dante titled his great poem of the Christian life, *The Divine Comedy*, and Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish theologian said that the Christian faith is the most humorous point of view a person can take. Why? because once you're confident of God's presence and power, once you've seen this world as the creation of God, once you know that life at its root is joy and not fear, then your sense of humor is guaranteed, you will never have to take yourself so seriously as you did before.

Three older ladies were discussing the travails of getting older. One said “Sometimes I catch myself with a jar of mayonnaise in my hand in front of the refrigerator, and can't remember whether I need to put it away, or start making a sandwich.”

The second lady chimed in, “Yes, sometimes I find myself on the landing of the stairs and can't remember whether I was on my way up, or on my way down.”

The third one responded, “Well, I'm glad I don't have that problem; knock on wood,” as she rapped her knuckles on the table, then told them, “That must be the door. I'll get it.”

For centuries people have been looking for the proverbial “Fountain of Youth” and to date no one has been able to find it. Age is one of the certainties of life and we might as well prepare for it to happen. It may not seem fair to us but that doesn't seem to stop it from coming - of course it beats the alternative.

I will never forget a time that my daughter was in the middle of a temper tantrum. I threatened to take everything away and I quickly exhausted my list and nothing I did worked. She had put up a stubborn fit and she wasn't going to stop. The longer she went on the madder I got. We were sitting in Brookdale Mall, people were walking by and looking at me like “Can't you control your child!!” Now I have never used a belt on my child and never would, but it was just one of those times when something came out of my mouth in frustration. One of those things that blurts out of our mouth when nothing else works. Well on this day I had tried everything! I bent over, looked her square in the eyes and said: “I'm gonna pull out my belt and really let you have it little girl if you don't stop making a fuss!!” Spontaneously she replied: “Your pants will fall down and everyone will see your big butt . . .!” I laughed and laughed and so did she. The bad time was over...humor put my stupidity in place.

Our text this morning is a story like the ones I have just shared with you. A story that has a humorous ending.

The text tells us that Abraham was in a tent in the middle of an oak grove. I imagine because of the words “he looked up” we can presume he was either kneeling or sitting. At any rate when he looked up he saw three men standing near him. In reality it was God and two angels. I don’t know about you but when I think about seeing God with two angels I think about seeing majestic garments. Yet these were dressed in traveler’s clothes. Keep in mind however that Abraham and Sarah do NOT realize this is God! Not yet. Abraham really gave them a tremendous greeting just as any Godly man would do. He ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground.

“I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 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.”

So Abraham ran back into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Honey make some corn bread and make enough for three!”

Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. 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.

“Where is your wife Sarah?” And he said, “There, in the tent.”

“I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.”

Now Sarah was eaves dropping on this conversation and when she heard this, realizing that her body had far aged past the child bearing years, she lost it! I mean she enjoyed for herself a side splitting, belly busting head hurting, and tear-producing laugh! She thought the angels were plum crazy.

Then came the apocalypse! God revealed Himself to them as He said:

“Why is Sarah laughing? I am God. Does she think this is an impossibility with me?”

Oh and then Sarah gets defensive with God: “I did NOT laugh!” Can’t you just picture a little smile on God’s face and a little chuckle as He said: “Oh yes you did!”

This story is truly about God who surprises us from time to time with His Grace by sending us moments of joy. We get so caught up in the problems of life, things like growing old, and bad golf games, and meeting this deadline and that deadline that we

often times miss the joys that are sent to us when we least expect them by a God of grace and a God of joy and I might add here a God of humor.

Don't get me wrong. I certainly believe there are times when we ought to be serious. I think for example that during a wedding or funeral, or even when we are administering and accepting the sacraments - this is a serious time. But I worry about people who have to be serious all the time about every single thing. God created laughter for a purpose. While I don't have any specific references to what that purpose is I do think it has something to do with enjoying life even in the midst of troubles.

Doctors tell us that people who have a good sense of humor are able to heal quicker than those who don't. There use to be a section in Readers Digest called "Laughter the Best Medicine." I believe it! I think laughter is therapeutic - very therapeutic in the process of healing as well as in the process of surviving life.

You see often life is what we make it. Life can be such a wonderful thing or a miserable thing. Life can be such a beautiful experience or a horrid experience. Life can be such a joy filled with laughter that God created or it can be a world filled with gloom and despair. God gives us a choice everyday to either live our lives as a sour pickle or to lighten up and laugh our way through life and enjoy it while we can. This is God's grace extended to you and I in the midst of trials and tribulations. He provides us opportunities to dry the tears and laugh our way through life. After all remember one day we all are going to have a tee-time in Heaven.