

Laughter and Serendipity

If you found yourself getting antsy during that really long reading from Genesis this morning, you probably had plenty of company.

But that long reading is just a long set-up for one of the best jokes in all of human history!

And it's a punchline worth waiting for!

After all, Abraham and Sarah waited a long time for that punchline to become real.

They left family, land and roots at the invitation of this unknown God.

They wandered for a long time.

Along the way, Sarah, then a hot young thing, got coerced into not one but two kings concubine harems; only to have God warn both kings to let her go.

They experienced the obliteration of Sodom and Gomorrah; and even saw their sister-in-law turned into a pillar of salt when she looked back at the carnage.

And through all of these adventures and calamities, the promise of a son continues to be assured.

All of which leads up to today, so many years after their long journey began, the punchline at long last arrives!

Which is this: 100 year old Abraham and 80-something Sarah, conceive, and then give birth, to a bouncing baby boy!

And I'll bet you dollars to donuts that if you went through what they went through, you'd do what Sarah does!

She laughs!

And you would've laughed too!

Laughter and serendipity is the very heart of God.

"Serendipity" meaning when something unexpectedly wonderful happens.

And the only possible human response is a bursting of joy and delight.

That same laughter and serendipity are picked up in today's gospel lesson.

Unlike the older testament reading, the gospel lesson isn't that long today.

But just like the older testament reading, the gospel reading is also a set up for another wonderful punchline!

One that's worth waiting for.

After all, Jesus has just rounded up 12 of the most ordinary, uninspiring and not particularly bright working stiffs; with a revolutionary and a tax collector thrown in for good measure.

This bunch of nobodies are his inner circle!

There's not a Rhodes Scholar in the group.

Not a single deep, religious thinker makes the cut.

There's no Daddy Warbucks with tons of money nor any stunningly beautiful fashion models either.

There's not even a doctor or lawyer or priest in the group.

Just a bunch of blue-collar folks trying their best to make it in this world.

And that's where the joke begins.

Because these ordinary, nothing special, motley crew of nobodies is sent out into the wider world by Jesus.

And lo and behold, the same crazy stuff that Jesus did last week, these nobodies are doing this week!

Last week, a little dead girl gets up and starts dancing around.

Last week, a woman who had uncontrolled bleeding for 12 years is suddenly all better.

Last week, prostitutes and tax collectors find that they are welcome at the table, a table that had forever previously excluded them.

And what's happening this week?

This week, the nobodies that Jesus has rounded up are laying hands on the lame — and the lame are walking!

They're putting mud and spit in the eyes of those who cannot see, and suddenly — vision is restored!

They stick their fingers in the stuffed up ears of the deaf — and whaddya know?!

They hear!

And who knows how many bald people got a head full of hair?

How many who couldn't do second grade math find themselves doing calculus?

How many with the soul sickness of anger, resentment or rage find all of that replaced with peace, joy, and gratitude?

And how do you not burst out laughing at the sheer crazy delight of it all?

Perhaps the greatest irony in all of Christianity is how our default relationship with God is mired in fear, solemnity, and ritual.

It's ironic because what is quite clear in all of scripture is that if God is a God of anything, well, God is first and foremost a God of laughter and serendipity!

That God delights in God's good creation, and in every single one of you.

And that God's goal for all of creation — is that creation be perfected as it was originally intended to be.

Isn't that what Paul is getting at this morning?

“Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.” Rom. 5:1.

Sit with that for a moment.

“We are justified by faith.”

Meaning, we don't have to DO anything to receive the overwhelming gifts of God!

We simply need to say “yes” to these free gifts.

We don't have to earn, deserve or beg for these free gifts.

We simply need to say “yes.”

It's faith, which is itself a free gift from God, that gives us peace with God.

So we need not fear God.

We need not think we must somehow appease God.

We need not waste time beating ourselves up for this or that defect of character, or indiscretion or shortcoming, because, in Christ, we have peace with God.

A peace that passes all understanding.

All of this because of God's free gift of grace.

Grace, like serendipity, is all about the spontaneous, unmerited gift, the undeserved favor we receive from God; simply because God wishes to share God's joy with us.

And if we can just allow ourselves to lighten up a bit, we might even find ourselves standing alongside Paul, boasting about this crazy turn of events!

That faith is not ultimately about sacrifice, ritual and rules.

But that faith is diving into the deep river of a God whose essential nature is laughter and serendipity!

Meister Eckhart, the profound Dominican mystic of the 1300s, knew this to be true:

"When God laughs at the soul and the soul laughs back at God, the persons of the Trinity are begotten.

When the Father laughs at the Son and the Son laughs back at the Father, that laughter gives pleasure, that pleasure gives joy, that joy gives love, and that love is the Holy Spirit."

Laughter and serendipity are at the heart of God.

We know this through our own experience with love and loving relationships.

Think about the person you have been deeply in love with in your life.

Isn't the most beautiful thing about that relationship how the other person simply delights us?

With a sense of humor?

With an insight?

Or by sharing an experience of wonder and beauty?

A sunset?

The magnificent yet sublime power of Kilauea's eruption?

A new moon peeking over the mountainside as dusk moves into night?

And yet each of us encountering such miracles from our own unique perspective.

Two weeks ago we thought deeply about the Holy Trinity.

We considered how relationship is the foundation of all that is.

That three unique persons make up the essence of the one God.

And the best laugh of all, the greatest gift of serendipity we can ever know, is that this notion of "persons in unity" – includes all of us.

That's what Paul knows as he assures us of "sharing in the glory of God."

What is the "glory of God" – but the ever growing love of persons in unity?

And so, I no longer believe that we will become faceless, nameless identity-less drops in the ocean when we pass to the next life.

Through laughter and serendipity, I believe that we shall maintain the essence of who we are as unique persons – in the unity of God – and in unity with all other people.

Yes, our faults and our foibles will be stripped away.

But our essence, our personhood, remains; so that in the unity of the Godhead, as distinct persons, we will delight, as one, in each other's uniqueness.

Isn't that our destiny?

A destiny that is filled with laughter – and serendipity?

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