

## “ROFL IS GR8”

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (There is a time for laughing)

Genesis 17:15-17; 18:9-14 (Both Abraham & Sarah laughed in amazement)

The Psalms 2:4-- “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision.”

Proverbs 31:25 - “Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.”

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Redlands First United Methodist Church

I asked Virginia to read our Scripture passages today, since she was likely to get us into the mood for a sermon on laughter.

Our Genesis scriptures give us examples of two very religious people—a wife and a husband—*laughing at God*.

The Scriptural verse from Proverbs describes a capable woman as one who does not fear the future; rather she *laughs at the time to come*. It is difficult to laugh and to be afraid at the same time—we are advised to laugh.

The Book of Ecclesiastes names 28 different human experiences and affirms that there is a time for each of them. Laughing is an important one of those experiences.

Finally, the Psalm describes *God as laughing*. God is not just laughing; God is getting others to laugh as well!

Let’s review: 1) God laughs.

2) We are **told** to enjoy life, that there is a time to laugh. Think about that, when we laugh and love life, we are obeying the scriptures!

3) We might even laugh at God when we’re amazed at what wonderful things God can do!

I hope you have had and will have many good laughs at this church, with good friends, as you have fun, as you enjoy life, and as you marvel at what God can do with you and all the rest of us! God has made a gift of the possibility of human happiness. It is a gift made to all. The more humans can experience joy, and help others to have joy, surely the more God would be joyous!

I’ve mentioned a dream of mine in last week’s sermon. I promise I won’t be sharing my dreams regularly. But I want to tell you of a dream that I had just before coming to serve this church, two years ago. In the dream, I give birth to a baby boy, on a bench, which is sort of like a bus stop bench, across the street from a hospital. The birth is so easy; it is not even painful. I mentioned that dream to my then 25-year-old daughter, and she and I pondered what it could mean: the birth of a new ministry, the birth of a book that was about to be released, or the birth of the person I want to be. She sounded to me as if she was taking this dream-discussion seriously, then out of the blue she said, “Mom, were you your *current age* in the dream?” After I said, “Yes” I realized my daughter was *laughing* at my dream.

If you think *my dream* is funny, “giving birth” at 60, imagine how Abraham and Sarah laughed at God when, according to the story, they learned they would have a child when they were past 90, not in a dream, but in real life!

I titled this sermon knowing that not all of us would know what ROFL means. ROFL is a shorthand that's used by some who text-message. It's short for "Rolling on the Floor with Laughter." We're likely to know this text shorthand if we are in certain generations or have children, or grandchildren, in those generations. However, I realize that even in naming text shorthand I'm sort of out-of-date. Our daughter laughed at me (again) when I began using such abbreviated language in my texting to her. I thought I was cool, but she laughed. I didn't quite understand why, but, not wanting to provide her amusement, I gave up the silly text-language and started spelling out every word correctly. Last time we were together she taught me a new texting process that uses something I hadn't even noticed on my cell phone--the T9 function. When the phone's set to that option, the phone *anticipates* what word you are going to spell and finishes it for you. So, you text a lot faster. Of course if the phone doesn't guess right, you're in for a very funny message! Good grief... There is a lot that's laughable in our current culture.

ROFL—Roll on the Floor with Laughter—that's exactly what Abraham did when God told him he would have a child in his very old age. Abraham and Sarah both laughed, not only because it seemed so absurdly impossible to have a child, but especially **because they wanted a child so badly!** They were very happy, and in disbelief.

This encounter between the three of them—God, Sarah, and Abraham—was no laughing matter. It was a serious encounter. God was making a covenant with them. God was informing Abraham and Sarah that they would be the ancestors of a multitude of nations and kings. To underscore the significance of what was happening to the two of them, God changed their names, from Abram to Abraham, which meant "father of the multitude" and from Sarai to Sarah.

Not long before, Abraham had fallen on his face *in prayer*. Now he *rolls on the floor with laughter!*

This prominent and elderly biblical couple named their child Isaac. You know what that means? "He laughs!" "He laughs." Think how would you like to be named the equivalent of that in English? Can you imagine answering to a teacher's roll call, "Jane," "Jim," and when it gets to you, the teacher calls out the name, "She laughs"?

When *God* realizes that Sarah is not just laughing *at* God, and at first, she doesn't even realize it is God she is talking to, God realizes that Sarah is asking a serious question. "Why?" God takes her seriously and answers her directly: "Why? Because nothing is too wonderful for God."

**I hope that everyone in this sanctuary has times coming up soon in our lives when we are amazed at what God can do, so amazed that we have at least a little internal chuckle about God's seeming miracles.**

I think one reason we are encouraged to laugh and laugh and laugh is that we should not take *ourselves* too seriously. Above all, we need to learn to *laugh at ourselves*.

One week during Sunday School class the children were asked what their mom's favorite flower was. Some said lilies, roses, and daisies. One of them, Julie Shuler didn't tell me which one, said, "Pillsbury."

The other day my broker called. He told me I'm broke.

I took the initiative with my Joker, though. I called her and requested a joke!

She suggested I tell you about the time in youth group when Jon Matthews asked why Joseph and Mary took Jesus *with them* to Jerusalem. One of the youth replied, "They couldn't get a baby sitter."

We have looked at the passages in *Genesis* where both Abraham and Sarah laugh at God because they are amazed at what became possible for them. The *Proverbs* quote is in the midst of a description of a “capable woman”--capable meaning a person who evidences *wise competence and vigor* in a variety of tasks. This woman is capable on several levels at the same time. She prepares strong clothing which enables her to be ready for any weather. Simultaneously she has prepared herself internally. Spiritually we might say she *wears* “strength” and “dignity” and can therefore be ready for whatever comes in the future. **It is because she has no fear that she can “laugh at the time to come.”**

Many of us probably do benefit or would benefit from putting an image of a laughing person, maybe a great photo of ourselves laughing, on some wall or mirror to remind us that **we do have whatever strength and dignity we need to enjoy the times to come in our lives. What a great way to look at the future: To laugh at it from a place of inner strength!--no reason for fear.**

The famous *Ecclesiastes* passage speaks of time, too--that was a favorite topic for the Wisdom writers. Notice that the 28 experiences that are listed by the compiler<sup>1</sup> begin with *being born* and end with *peace*. Those are the first and last words: “There is a time to be born”... and at the end of the list, “a time for peace.” Whereas in *Psalms 2*, the happy life is one which trusts that God rules the world, in *Ecclesiastes*, it’s taken for granted that nature includes different seasons and experiences. The compiler of *Ecclesiastes* is stating his or her empirical observation: Things occur according to their season. Yet, except for being born and dying, all the experiences involve a large measure of human choice. The idea is that wise persons know the right times for the right responses.

It’s hard to categorize laughter. For me at least, it seldom feels like a choice. I confess it takes a lot to make me laugh. I like to laugh, but many times when I hear a joke, even when I *get* the joke, I smile, “thinking” to myself, “that’s funny,” but I don’t laugh. I’d like to laugh more. I recall being in my 20’s and laughing at some TV show and I also remember when our children were young, telling John I wanted to find some TV show that would make me laugh. About the only time I’m guaranteed to laugh is when I get together with my sister. Our husbands and children just look at us and roll their eyes; we always seem to find something to be hilarious, and I love it. I’d love to have any advice on how to get into situations which evoke laughter. Think about what makes you laugh. We can help each other in this endeavor to laugh!

At church, we have an ongoing dialogue with each other as we make sense of life, as we share both tears and laughter at appropriate times. May we have lots and lots of times when we laugh at God for giving us so much that is good, and may we have such internal strength that we can laugh at the future, knowing we are ready for it.

One final request: Please feel free to call me with any of your thoughts. I have an answering machine now in my car. It says, “I’m home now, but leave a message and I’ll call you back when I’m out.”...

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<sup>i</sup> Biblical scholars call the compiler of Ecclesiastes *Qohelet*