

There was a pastor whose wife was to have surgery.

It was a pretty extensive surgery, that is, it would take several hours.

Just before going under anesthetic, she said to her husband, who was the pastor,
in case I do not make it, go look under the bed at home and find a shoebox.

Well, right after she went into the operating room, he was just too curious.

What was in this shoebox under the bed?

Knowing it would be a long surgery- you guessed it - he ran home and looked under the bed.

Sure enough, there was a shoebox. He opened it.

What was there were three eggs and about \$10,000 in cash.

He went back to the hospital. She survived surgery just fine – and after she was awake -
he confessed that his curiosity got the best of him – and he had looked into the shoebox.

He said, I could understand the money being there, but why the eggs?

And she said, that over the several years they had been married
and in all those years of listening to his sermons,
that whenever a sermon laid an egg, so to speak,
she would put an egg in the box.

His spirits rose quickly - wow! Only three in all those years!

He must be a great preacher.

And then she finished her sentence:

...and when there were twelve eggs I would go sell them
and put the money on the box.

It is good for the body to laugh. It is a mark of health. It is a mark of spirit.

This story Don read of Abraham and his visitors
and Sarah laughing – and then denying it – and
the Lord replying, “Yes, you did.”

This is another of those priceless stories -
stories where we get glimpses of the divine.

In this story, the divine is realized in three men who visit Abraham
while he sits at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.

Last week we talked about ways to encounter God
not so much in the revealing, or *revelation*, of the Bible – as we traditionally consider -
but in the *realization* of the divine as we encounter our lives.

In this story of Abraham, who receives a visit from three men
it is made clear that God is appearing in these three visitors.

So, here is a *realization* more than a revelation.

It is an encounter with the living God realized but described as three visitors.

Last week we also talked about “interruptions” and how we may
if we watch closely, if we listen closely – discover divine actions, or perhaps mysteries,
in what may seem - an interruption in our lives.

This seemed a welcome interruption in Abraham’s life.

Abraham sees them and gets up and runs to meet them – and bows to them –
an act of welcome.” Come rest and we will get you something to eat.”

Hospitality – the divine seems to love hospitality.

Actually, the Talmud tells of Abraham being in conversation with God
at the time the strangers (angels) arrived -
a little different way to hear the story.

Just the same,

the whole scene begs us to see the humor found in a story where three strangers
visit Abraham’s tent in the heat of the day
and in the course of the visit – advise him, and Sarah,
(as old as they are)
that they would be new parents by this time next year.

Now there is a father’s day surprise.

There is something to laugh about.

And Sarah laughs. And the Lords says, “Why did Sarah laugh and say,

‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ ”

And the answer is, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

But she suddenly becomes afraid, “I did not laugh.”

“Yes, you did laugh,” the Lord said. Can’t you see it?

Here this is, one of our foundational stories, in the Old Testament.

And, it has laughter. It has a sense of humor.

And it comes in the context of hospitality.

What I notice is that two things run deep -
so very deep in the Jewish and Christian traditions -
hospitality and laughter seem to be part of the divine underpinnings of our
relationship with God. And why not?

Laughter is good for you.

Did you know that there are therapeutic laughter fitness programs?

We can be in a class of "laughter yoga."

There is a such thing now as "laughter fitness."

It was developed in India in the mid 90's.

Dr. Madan Kataria was concerned about his patients' stress level.

At first he used the traditional practice of yoga in parks as a way to relieve stress.

And he told jokes.

About a week later he ran out of jokes, and so he just started to laugh without jokes.

It worked. Laughter is an aerobic exercise; it relieves stress and boosts the immune system.

Now there are certified laugh leaders. Gail Wolz is one of them.

Gail had been diagnosed with an aggressive form of arthritis
that made her immune system attack her joints. She was depressed.
And she found that when she was depressed her arthritis was worse,
She said that she gave up television news and Stephen King novels,
and then she spotted a story in *The Seattle Times* about a "laughter fitness" class.

When I was doing Dahn yoga the instructor would sometimes have us be on the floor
and have us laugh so hard that we rolled over on the floor.

Have you done that? We call it a belly laugh.

I would invite you to do it, but the pews get in our way.

But perhaps sometimes we should remove them and sit on the floor
so we could roll in laughter.

Go home and do it.

You see, those who research this have found that not only does laughter bring relief from stress, anxiety and tension (which is obvious) it improves pain tolerance, increases brain-cell functioning, builds stronger immune system, stimulates respiration, circulation, and digestion.

So, laughter is healthy physically.

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A few days ago an article appeared in Russia Today, a periodical.

The title of the article is "Did Communism Die of Laughter"?

It starts out by saying, "George Orwell once said that every joke is a tiny revolution."

The article goes on to suggest that it was jokes that contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union and communist regimes across Eastern Europe - ordinary jokes by ordinary citizens.

The state tried to prevent them from telling them, and would even arrest people for telling jokes.

For example, a joke from the 1930's about three guys discussing how they got to the prison which was called the Gulag.

The joke tells you all about Stalinism.

"One says: I'm here because I was five minutes late for work every day and they charged me with sabotage.

The second says, that's funny because I was five minutes early every day and they charged me with espionage.

The third one says: I'm here because I got to work on time every single day month after month and they charged me with owning a western watch."

Soviet jokes – old Soviet jokes now.

Perhaps they did gradually shake the foundations of communism - and finally they spread up the hierarchy until Mikhail Gorbachev himself was telling these jokes to conservative leaders in an attempt to explain that things had to change.

Here is one he told one day on a television show:

“People are waiting in one of those long lines and blaming Gorbachev.
One of them says “I’ll go and kill him. And off he went. But then he comes back.

The line has moved on but it’s still long.

So the people ask him – did you kill Gorbachev? No, he answers,

The line there is even longer.”¹

Every joke is a tiny revolution.

Nowadays jokes are no longer banned,
and politicians need to be capable of poking fun at themselves.
In fact, here in the US being on Saturday Night Live is sometimes important for a candidate.

Laughter breaks down barriers.

Some people who study organizations will look for the laughter,
recognizing it is a sign of health. Is there joy? Is there enthusiasm?

There is more to laughter than meets the eye.

And laughter in the scripture is even sometimes
part of the divine-human dialogue.

Sarah laughed. And the Lord says, you laughed, and she denies it.
And the Lord says, “ Yes, you did.” And she laughed again when her son was born.

And here right in the beginning of the story – Genesis -
is this account of laughter – and surprise – the start of something big.

So, I invite you, encourage you – take seriously laughter.

It is healthy for you. It breaks down barriers.

I expect it even breaks down some barriers at the cellular level in our bodies.

It communicates across language barriers.

It is one of the languages of God.

And for today, I want to leave you with this thought that
you may encounter the divine in laughter, and in play,
that is having fun and laughing has its own health.

It has its own way of breaking down barriers.

Reason to Laugh – based on Genesis 18:1-15
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And there is not a one of us that does not have barriers of one kind or another in our life.

There is not a one of us who does not long for greater health,
the healing of body, mind, and spirit.

Abraham running out of the shadow of his tent to welcome three strangers -
strangers with a message that has to be laughed at.

Some of the best things in life just require a good sense of humor.

¹ <http://www.russiatoday.ru/features/news/26017>