

Questioning Our Values
“Reassessing Our Laughter”
Luke 6:20-26

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On that tragic Tuesday of September 11, 2001, a New York City parish priest standing on the corner of 14th Street and 1st Avenue witnessed the first terrorist plane plunging into the Twin Towers. “I stood there in shock and disbelief,” says the priest. “Without fully comprehending what was happening, I walked into the church and said the morning Mass.” Normally, about a hundred persons attend this weekday service. That morning there were several hundred. The Gospel reading for the day was, *“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.”* Even in the early moments of this world tragedy,” says the priest, “I wondered how these words of Christ could ever be true.”

Questioning our values – that’s what we’ve been talking about these Lenten Sundays. Today, we approach the question of laughing and weeping. *“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.”* What could be the meaning of this Beatitude? May I suggest four things.

TROUBLE HAPPENS

It rains on the just and the unjust. Pain is no respecter of persons. Never does the morning wear to evening without some heart breaking – a heart just as sensitive as yours and mine. That’s life. You who want to ignore that fact with shallow laughter, or bury your head in the sand of some spring break beach, or immerse yourself in the brackets of basketball frenzy—beware and be warned. For sudden as a plane soaring out of the sky, our happy-go-lucky, laughter-filled lives, can turn to weeping and mourning, and gnashing of teeth. That’s life.

I don’t mean to be morbid today, but over these last 40 years:
I’ve trudged through too many soft green cemeteries,
Walked down too many hospital corridors,
Navigated church members through endless family quarrels,
Dug through enough dark nights of my own soul to believe that
Life is a bed of roses for anyone, anywhere, anytime.

A couple of weeks ago, I gave the invocation for a Brentwood/Cool Springs Chamber of Commerce meeting. The Mayor of Franklin was there to give his State of the City speech, and the ballroom was packed with business people and politicians. Before the Mayor spoke, the assembly paused to honor a fallen soldier from Williamson County. The young man’s parents happened to be sitting at the table next to me. I looked deep into their eyes as the crowd stood to applaud the supreme sacrifice of

their soldier son. After a few minutes, the meeting continued, but I couldn't get the look of those parents off my mind.

I'm not smart enough to know the politics of war, but I am human enough to question how we can go our merry ways, living our normal lives, making a pleasant living, while over 3,000 of our young men and women have been killed in combat, and another 23,000 have been seriously wounded. Add to that another half million innocent civilians including women and children who have died in the crossfires of this fighting, and the least we can do is get off our high horses of politics and onto our knees before Almighty God seeking mercy and peace.

"Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep." Trouble happens. Sometimes we bring the trouble on ourselves.

CRYING HELPS *"Blessed are you who weep now."*

From a physical point of view, tears are essential to health. If our tear ducts dry up, we are in a peck of trouble. Tears keep the eyes moist and clear of dirt. Tears also contain substances that fight against infection. When a foreign substance invades the eye, tears come to wash it out. Thank God for tears.

Tears are good for the soul as well. They help us rejoice, and assist in our grief. People who never cry have hearts that are turned into concrete. Jacob wept, Joseph wept, David wept, Hannah wept, and Mary wept. The shortest verse in the Bible says, *"Jesus wept."*

The prophet Jeremiah said, *"If my head were a spring of tears, I would weep day and night for my people."*

I will never forget big, football star, Rosie Grier, back in the 70's on that album "Free to Be You and Me" singing with gusto:

It's all right to cry; crying lets the sad out of ya,
Raindrops from your eyes, washing all the mad out of ya.
It's all right to cry, it might make you feel better.

So our aim in life need not to be to always "hold it in," "turn it off," and "shove it down." The writer of Ecclesiastes said it well, *"For everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven. There is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance."*

COMFORT COMES

Matthew states the Beatitude this way, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."*

That's a great word – comfort. It means to fortify, to strengthen, to support.

The house we own is built on a hillside. It has a deck that is held up by long posts. A

member of this congregation took one look at our house and exclaimed, “Howard surely bought this house in the dark. Nobody would locate on a hill like this in the daylight.” He is right. My point is this. Those long posts fortify and support the deck. They hold it up. I could correctly say that my deck is “comforted” by these posts. Do you get the picture? That is what comfort means in the Bible. It is not pity. It is not control. Comfort is Aaron and Hur holding up the arms of Moses when he grows weary leading the Children of Israel in battle.

God sends people to comfort us in the storms of life. A child dropped this note in the offering plate a few months ago. “Dear God, I will gladly give one day of my life for Dr. Olds to be healed.”

Sandy and I were working in the yard at our cabin last Monday when our neighbor stopped by. He was in a golf cart, on an air mattress, in the last stages of Lou Gehrig’s disease. I didn’t know he was still alive, but this couple who have gone through hell for years now, stopped to see how I was doing. Slowly, he partially raised his hand to take my hand and said, “I pray for you often.” That’s compassion. There is no caring, like the caring of another who knows the depths of the valley too.

God himself offers comfort in the person of the Holy Spirit. Remember what Jesus said to his troubled disciples. *“It is for your good that I go away. For unless I go, the Comforter cannot come, but if I go, I will send Him to you.”*

Let me tell you the truth. God helps us in all our troubles, so that we may be able to help others with the same help we received from God himself. So, sometimes when I struggle, I stand on the promises of an old song my mother used to sing:

The Comforter has come, the Comforter has come,
The Holy Ghost from heaven, the Father’s promise given,
O spread the tidings round, where ever man is found,
The Comforter has come.

LAUGHTER LIFTS. *“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”*

The early Greek Orthodox Church had an unusual custom on the day after Easter. Clergy and laity gathered in the sanctuary to tell jokes, stories, and anecdotes that caused people to laugh. They were not there for the comedy. They were there for the celebration. They were there to rejoice in the biggest joke of all that God pulled on Satan – the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. They gathered in great laughter to affirm that forgiveness outdoes guilt, that evil is overcome with good, that life does outlast death. When that news hits our hearts, we have great reason to rejoice.

Robert Schuller shares a letter he received from one of his listeners on [The Hour of Power](#). It went in part like this:

Dear Dr. Schuller,

In 1961, my wife and I got married and shortly thereafter, we suffered a financial reversal that made me bitter. We wanted children, but discovered we couldn't have one. That made me more bitter. Finally, we adopted a little boy, but then we found out he was mentally retarded. I became even more bitter. The bitterest day of my life was when little Joey died. The day we buried him I completely stopped believing in God. The years passed. My wife started watching your show. I wanted nothing to do with either God or positive thinking, but one day you said something that caught my attention. Slowly, I have come to believe again. I have accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. My wife and I have decided to start working with mentally retarded children. We just thought you might like to know. Joy comes in the morning.

Isn't that how the Psalmist put it? *"Weeping may last for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."* Maybe it's the right time for you to experience a sunrise!