

Sunday 27th September

Laughter
is an
instant
vacation. 🤗
- Milton Berle

It might seem strange to focus on laughter when we're facing the possibility of another full lockdown, but maybe that makes it even more appropriate. Sometimes I have been accused of finding everything funny, which is unfair: I take many things very seriously indeed, but my own way of coping with really bad situations – and I know I'm not alone in this – is to look out for the bizarre, the absurd in it all and laugh, and that truly helps me.

Many years ago I used to holiday at Scargill House in Yorkshire, their holiday weeks often attended by a lot of single people like myself. One free afternoon four of us decided to go for a walk, even though it was raining – persistent, penetrating drizzle. Walking along, being relative strangers, we shared stories. I had recently been widowed, another woman had been made redundant and, at her age, was unsure if she could find further employment. A third had been so pressured at work that she had had a breakdown. The fourth had a child with a rare medical condition, coping with which had broken her marriage and now she'd become ill herself. There was a bit of sharing of 'where is God in this', but primarily we listened quietly to one another.

Back indoors, we stood, dripping gently, then one of us – I can't remember who - said, "What a pathetic bunch to go for a walk together!" And we suddenly found the situation funny and laughed at ourselves, really laughed. (The dry people walking past looked at us as if we were plain crazy!) Afterwards the lady whose child was so ill said that she couldn't remember the last time she'd laughed like that, and how healing it had been.

I firmly believe that finding the funny side in a situation is not contrary to our calling as Christians. There is humour in the Bible, probably more than we think, because we don't know all the situations in which people spoke, or their tone of voice. For instance, read **Galatians 5: 1-14**, part of Paul's rebuttal of the people who were insisting that men had to be circumcised before they could become Christians, and imagine the people hearing the letter read out - and chuckling, as they probably did (v.12), before they had the joy of being encouraged.

In the Old Testament, we have Elijah mightily sarcastic as the prophets of Baal tried to bring down fire **1 Kings 18: 26-27**, but given that he was in a rather hyper mood he's perhaps not the best role model. My point, though, is that faith does not have to be a gloomy, serious matter, and that humour, finding the absurd, the foolish and laughing should be part of our faith, especially when we're laughing at our own absurdities and, dare I say, noticing the absurdities of the church.

Finding humour, lightness in our present situation is not easy. Finding absurdity is easier – the ruling that pubs had to close at ten (to which I'm certainly not objecting) has got people laughing: does the virus only come out to play at ten? Sadly, though, the absurdity of much today is less funny than dangerous, and that has to be faced and challenged, that is the time to be serious.

But while there are times to be serious it is still possible to find a lightness of spirit and even to laugh, always. Laughter could, indeed, give us a holiday from the distress of the moment.

Does God laugh? Well he must have a sense of humour: after all, he made human beings and they really can be absurd! Definitely me. Maybe even you?



Pause to think – who makes your life better? Who helps you laugh, and love?

A prayer:

Creator, creative Lord God, you have so placed us that we live in a world that is both beautiful and bizarre, a world in which we find depths of wonder and awe and depths of uncertainty, sorrow and pain.

It can be hard to live through the pain and sorrow, hard to live with uncertainty, as at the present moment.

We try to be positive for the sake of others, but it can be draining and leave us low.

Father, your Son, Jesus lived through a time of deep uncertainty too, lived with the knowledge of the death that would come to him.


His early followers, too, lived with great uncertainty and, sometimes, great fear.

Loving Lord, when we are fearful, hold us tightly in your love and by your Holy Spirit give us the courage we need


and the guidance to know the wise way to live and the best way forward.


We pray this gift especially for our government and Members of Parliament at this difficult time in the life of our nation as we face not only Coronavirus, but also all the uncertainties that the Brexit negotiations are raising.

Bless, we pray, those who work to bring help in our own country and abroad,

 those who work within hospitals and clinics, and within people's homes;

 those who work in food banks;

 those who go into places and among people other folk fear and reject, bringing new hope and life, smiles, laughter and love;

 those who lead acts of worship that lift our hearts nearer to you
and inspire us to live more fully each day.

Thank you for these people, and for those we meet who smile and laugh,
even behind masks; those who raise our spirits by their words and by their lives.

Help us, loving, living God to be people who bring hope and joy by just being ourselves.

And when we are very preoccupied with who we are and all that is wrong,
help us, next time we look in a mirror, to see our own absurdity, and laugh.

We ask it in the name of Jesus your Son, he who offers hope and joy to all.

Amen

*“God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

John 3: 17

PS. I gave my own nieces a good laugh yesterday when they saw the scar from a facial operation I recently had to have. “It looks as though you’ve had a face-lift!” they crowed.

PPS. I haven’t.

Blessings, Ruth