

# “Humor that Heals”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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## Scriptures

Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

Mark 5:35-43

## Hymns/Songs

"Lord of All Hopefulness"

"Let Us Break Bread Together" 265

"Hark, Hark My Soul" 951

## **Ecclesiastes 3:1-4**

### ***A Time for Everything***

**3** For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

<sup>2</sup> a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
<sup>3</sup> a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
<sup>4</sup> a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

## **Mark 5:35-43**

<sup>35</sup> While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" <sup>36</sup> But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "**Do not fear, only believe.**" <sup>37</sup> And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. <sup>38</sup> They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. <sup>39</sup> And when he had entered, he said to them, "**Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.**" <sup>40</sup> And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. <sup>41</sup> Taking her by the hand he said to her, "**Talitha cumi,**" which means, "**Little girl, I say to you, arise.**" <sup>42</sup> And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. <sup>43</sup> And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

### **Insight for Worship**

#### *Marriage Love 208*

“A state of peace is the state of the Lord's kingdom. In that state the Lord's heavenly and spiritual blessings seem to be in their dawn and their springtime. Peace resembles dawn at the break of day and spring in the greening of the year. The dawn and the spring cause the senses and everything that touches them to be filled with joy and gladness. Each sensation draws its effect from the overall effect of the daybreak and the blooming of the year. It is the same with the peaceful state of the Lord's kingdom. In that state, every heavenly and every spiritual feature enjoys the flowering laughter of its springtime dawn — that is, its most genuine happiness. A state of peace affects every feature this way because the Lord is peace itself.”

#### **SERMON:** “Humor that Heals” by Rev. Kit B. Billings

I would imagine that some, if not most of you this morning, are aware of the long-standing Christian tradition of celebrating what has been called a “Holy Humor Sunday.” For centuries Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches have celebrated both Easter Monday and “Bright Sunday” (the Sunday following Easter) as days of joy and laughter. The custom of Easter Monday and Bright Sunday celebrations were rooted in the musings of early church theologians (like Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom) that God played a practical joke on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead. Easter was God’s supreme joke played on death, they reasoned, and from that day forward the Lord began turning mourning into dancing and sadness into joy.

So, now (if your first morning coffee has started to take effect) you may be wondering, “So, if Bright Sunday also known as Holy Humor Sunday is such a long-standing tradition, then why in the world did our minister manage to not celebrate it yet? Why did Kit choose to allow us to avoid a highlight worship theme like spiritual humor?” Well, I will tell you why: it’s because the Sunday following Easter is well known to be one of lowest attendance Sundays throughout the year—and I truly believe that humor, laughter and joyful themes in our lives are one of the most powerful tools God gives us to inspire and enlighten us throughout life.

Did you know that good, clean and gentle humor about ourselves and each other is actually a sign of deep spiritual strength, faithfulness and trust? It is, because of these three reasons: 1) it is a physical-emotional-and-spiritual reminder that for REAL God has this whole universe, our whole world and all of our lives **fully in His hands**, which means

that I can trust God so completely that my soul experiences an uplift if you will, and a buoyancy to it, which easily triggers humor, wit and laughter in life; 2) God's Word tells us that a good road of life is one of balance, as we hear in *Ecclesiastes*; and 3) take a good, close look at how our Lord Jesus Christ used parables, words and actions that can easily be seen as expressions of a wry wit and even a bit of whimsy too.

Let us use a simple, fun story right now as a light-hearted experiment and let ourselves laugh as much as we want to and then let's see how it affects us mentally, emotionally and spiritually. For weeks a six-year-old lad kept telling his first-grade teacher about the baby brother or sister that was expected at his house. One day his mother allowed the boy to feel the movements of the unborn child on her belly. The six-year old was obviously impressed, but made no comment. Furthermore, he stopped telling his teacher about the impending event. Well, his teacher finally sat the boy on her lap and asked him, "Tommy, whatever has become of that baby brother or sister you were expecting at home?" Suddenly, Tommy burst into tears and confessed, **"I think Mummy ate it!"**

Now, assuming that you thought that was a fairly funny story, which made you giggle and laugh a bit, take a moment and notice how your laughter is affecting you? It feels good to laugh and chuckle, right? Healthy humor, which avoids hurting people's feelings and which often helps us to laugh at ourselves, reminds us experientially that while life's difficulties, disappointments and suffering are real, what is even more powerful and reliable is the truth that God always has us in the palm of His hands, and no matter how challenging life gets, He remains constantly in charge—pulling and guiding us toward all that is good and true. This is what Divine Providence is and does!

No wonder that two of our world's greatest modern spiritual leaders, the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, were often seen spending a good portion of their time together during a book writing project they did in 2016 enjoying a lot of uplifting chortling, giggling and belly laughing. They trusted one another deeply, which allowed them to laugh together and not at each other. And so, they triggered good humor together, while also having many moments of profundity and sanctity. The Dalai Lama was quoted as saying, "It is much better when there is not too much seriousness. Laughter and joking is much better. Then we can be completely relaxed." He then went on to share that he once met some scientists in Japan who explained that wholehearted laughter—not artificial laughter—is very good for your heart and your health in general." (*The Book of Joy*, p. 147) And isn't it fascinating that *humor*, like *humility*, comes from the same root word for *humanity*: *humus*. The lowly and sustaining earth is the source for all three words. Is it any surprise that we have to have a sense of humility

to be able to laugh at ourselves and that to laugh at ourselves reminds us of our shared humanity?

*Ecclesiastes 3* has long been one of the most highly quoted passages in the Bible, in part because it masterfully and concisely helps us to remember that one of God's greatest talents is His ability to keep life in balance. And so we read together:

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

<sup>2</sup> a time to be born, and a time to die;  
 a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
<sup>3</sup> a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
 a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
<sup>4</sup> a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
 a time to mourn, and a time to dance." (vs. 1-4)

And yet, how tempted we can feel to throw our arms up in panic and disgust, when in reality our Almighty, all wise and all seeing God, keeps life in balance, as well as us in between the forces of Heaven and Hell, preserving our freedom to think, to reflect and to choose.

In conclusion, let us be willing and able to look at how the Lord dealt with life's most challenging elements in ways that teach us the most joyous truths of His power to love and heal us, even in the face of death. Our story this morning in *Mark 5* illustrates this divinely. One day a local leader of a synagogue named Jairus implored Christ to come and heal his dying twelve-year-old daughter. As they approached Jairus' town, one of his assistants met him and informed him that his precious little girl had died. Everyone began weeping, but Jesus turns things toward the Divine Light of truth, telling everyone they do not need to grieve, because Jairus' daughter was only sleeping. Everyone laughed at Jesus in a negative, un-spiritual way (which reminds us that humor can be either heavenly and healing, or, hurtful and hellish). The Lord tells them, "**The child is not dead but sleeping.**" (vs. 39)

And then He brings her into a secluded place, and says to her, "**Talitha cumi,**" which means, "**Little girl, I say to you, arise.**" (vs. 41) This is the Lord's effect upon our finite, human souls. He bids us after life's heartbreaking times to open ourselves unto His Divine forces and wisdom, and arise! Just as we experience with every new dawn and every wondrous Springtime, God pours His healing goodness over and within us, triggering the "flowering laughter" of each Springtime dawn — blessing us with Heaven's "most genuine happiness." **Healing humor can be found not only on Easter and Bright Sundays, but every day—because as Mark Twain learned, humor is one of God's chief attributes.** When we learn what is of supreme importance in God's governing of life, we become able to vividly perceive that healthy laughter is born and reborn within a growing belief in a good and meaningful universe. Amen.