

**HOLY LAUGHTER SUNDAY
APRIL 11TH, 2010**

WE GATHER TOGETHER

MUSICAL PRELUDE

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

Candles are used to set the mood, and to mark special occasions like birthdays. As we light this Christ Candle may the mood be one of excitement and celebration as we gather together in the delightful presence God's Spirit.

CALL TO WORSHIP

We come into the presence of a God, we can neither see, nor touch, yet a God we can sense.

We are fools for Christ's sake.

We come in the name of Jesus, whose beauty we cannot explain or capture, but know intimately.

We are fools for Christ's sake.

We come to hear from a book, words and stories that are ancient, and yet ever new.

We are fools for Christ's sake.

We live in a world whose economy is based on keeping, yet in this place we are invited to give.

We are fools for Christ's sake.

We come and leave all the business of our lives. There are so many more important things that we can be doing, defying reason and propriety and good order; come and worship

We are fools for Christ's sake.

HYMN #624

"Give to Us, Laughter"

OPENING PRAYER: (unison)

O Great Laughing God, we come into your presence with joy and longing to be surprised. We thank you that you have given to us the gift of laughter and delight. These things give hints as to the nature of your purpose for us and for all the earth. May we find that in giving up to laughter there is healing and hope and abundance and blessing. Tickle our souls with the brush of your Spirit to renew our worship and our living. Amen.

WORDS TO WELCOME

PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

We confess, O God, that at times we are a serious bunch. We are too proud, too restrained; too proper to let out a spiritual giggle. We deem it foolish and childish, beneath us, but God, in laughter there is so much to transform our spirits and heal our hearts. Remind us that to laugh is to be vulnerable and to lose control, and though this can be a scary state, it is also good for us. We desire to trust you so much that we are known by the world as a fun-loving church. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

What does the smile of God, look like? It looks like us, forgiven, renewed, transformed and called, "God's beloved friends."

Thanks be to God. Amen.

WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

SCRIPTURE LESSON

I Corinthians 1:18-31
Luke 13:6-9

RESPONSE:

God is good
All the time!
All the time
God is good!

HYMN #43 (More Voices)

"The Play of the God-head" (vs. 1&2)

CHILDREN'S TIME

What are some of your favourite games? What do you like to play? (Make some suggestions like soccer, hockey, go fish, monopoly, scrabble, etc.)

What do you think God likes to play? It's not often that we think about God being silly and just having fun do we?

Silly? What does "silly" mean to you? Did you know that in Old English the word, silly, meant "happy, humble and innocence," and it has the same root as the word "holy." The bible tells us to be "holy as God is holy," which kind of means that God asks us to be silly too....to be happy, and humble and innocent.

I think if God plays a game with us, it would be kind of like "hide-n-go-seek." Sometimes God is it, and has to go looking for us, and sometime we're it, and we have to go looking for God. The game never really ends, and God never gets bored or frustrated and goes home. God is always in the game.

SHARING OUR CELEBRATIONS AND CONCERNS

PRAYER AND PRAYER OF JESUS

HYMN #43 (More Voices)

"The Play of the God-head" (vs. 3)

MINUTE FOR MISSION

SERMON

So just what is spiritual manure?

Prayer:

God, you invite us to find ourselves in these stories of faith.....be our teacher. Open us up to the possibility that you want us to have fun with this faith stuff, so that the world may know that you are present in the games of our life. Amen.

Where is God when crap happens? Why do bad things happen to good people? Scholars call the pursuit of the answers to these questions, "theodicy." The context for the sharing of this parable, is in the middle a similar discussion. Jesus shares a parable, a story with meaning, about the owner of a fig tree that had no figs, and a gardener. We should read a parable open to finding God and God's activity, and ourselves and an appropriate response to God's actions.

The story goes that a certain land owner had a fig tree that was growing, and for all intents and purposes looked healthy....it had leaves, and shoots, but it had no figs. Every time the owner came to the tree looking for figs, he was frustrated and eventually told the gardener to cut it down, because it was just taking up good dirt.

I wonder if the world has that same frustration when it comes to the Christian church....do they see our works, hear our words, and have the expectation that there will be something that staves their hunger, and yet find nothing more than words and fluff. It looks like a church, it walks like a church, it quacks like a church, but there is no fruit.

But before the axe is laid to the roots of this tree of Christian faith, what we need is the attention of the good gardener and a little spiritual manure!

One Sunday morning when this scripture was being read in church, Jack, a 5 year old boy was sitting with his Mom and sister. When he heard the word “manure” he giggled out loud. It seemed silly to him; but the sad thing is that the grow ups missed the joke, so intent on being a proper church.

Scripture tells us that “a little child shall lead them,” and that morning Jack’s response lead the congregation in an imaginative exploration of what God’s manure would be.

Manure is technically refuse, garbage the things we have no use for any longer, and for today, maybe the thing that can cause spiritual fruit to be found in us, is the ability to play and have a little fun. To be silly: to invest our worship with humour, humility, and foolishness.

So how does this idea of play answer the question of theodicy? It reminds us that those things that we deem as little value be it sadness or delight are redeemed by the presence of God, and the grace that strengthens our faith. As the hymn says, “laughter with tears brings most healing relief,” is true.

In a world that is so bound by productivity God invites us to lay down our tools in favour of toys. In a world where people are seeking the next big high, or extreme sport experience, maybe the first thing on the church’s sign is that this worship and God stuff is as much fun as a good and energetic game of Hide-n-go-Seek.

WE RESPOND WITH THANKSGIVING

HYMN #703 (Voices United)

“In the Bulb There is a Flower”

INVITATION TO GIVE:

There are two things that can be done here. Find a joke, a clean one, and tell it; follow it with: the Bible tells us that “God loves a cheerful giver!” Let’s present our gifts with cheerfulness and fun.

Another option is to have the congregation do the wave a couple of times across the sanctuary; once they have done this, say that “God loves a cheerful giver!”

PRESENTATION OF OUR GIFTS: (#131 Voices United vs. 15)

But, our God, who holds the banquet,

Calls the whole world into freedom

Opens up the new creation: Dayeinu!

Da-da-yeinu, da-da-yeinu, Da-da-yeinu,

Dayeinu, dayeinu, dayeinu!

Da-da-yeinu, da-da-yeinu, Da-da-yeinu,

Dayeinu, dayeinu, dayeinu!

DEDICATION OF OUR TITHES AND OFFERINGS

THE LIFE AND WORK OF THE CONGREGATION

(These are the announcements)

PRAYERS:

God of Fools, Lord of Clowns and Smiling Saints, we rejoice in this playful prayer that you are a God of laughter and of tears. Blessed are you, for you have rooted within us the gifts of humour, lightheartedness, and mirth, with jokes and comedy, you cause our hearts to sing as laughter is made to flow out of us.

We are grateful that your Son, Jesus, who was this world's master of wit, daily invites us to be fools for your sake, to embrace the madness of your prophets, holy people, and saints.

We delight in holy madness which becomes the very medicine to heal the chaos of the cosmos since it calls each of us out of the hum-drumness of daily life into joy, adventure, and, most of all, into freedom.

We, who are so easily tempted to barter our freedom for tiny speckles of honour and power, are filled with gratitude that your Son's very life has reminded us to value only love, the communion with other persons and with you, and to balance honour with humour.

With circus bands and organ grinders, with fools, clowns, court-jesters, and comics, with high-spirited angels and saints, we too join the fun and foolishness of life, so that your holy laughter may ring out to the edges of the universe. Blessed are you, Lord our God, who invites us to be holy fools. Amen.

Taken from pray all ways by: Edward Hays

WE ARE SENT OUT WITH LAUGHTER

HYMN #884

"You Shall Go Out With Joy"

COMMISSION AND BLESSING

Laughter and joy are the good news of a church tended with love by a wise and warm God who stirs us up, and pours on the spiritual manure that cause fruit to grow in us to sustain all the earth.

Be blissed by God now and always,

Amen.

CHORAL BENEDICTION: (#624 Voices United vs. 2)

Give to us laughter as sign of deep joy;

Let us in laughing find Christian employ,

Joining with stars and with bright northern lights,

Laughing and praising and sharing delights.