

Humor Me....

[Text - Matthew 11:16-19; 28-30]

Pastor Dave Shackle

July 9, 2017

Jesus says, 'To what shall I compare this generation? You're like a bunch of spoiled, cranky kids who are unhappy with anyone or anything that's different. We play cheerful flute music, and you won't dance; we sing a solemn dirge, and you don't mourn. You condemn John the Baptist's serious and strict lifestyle as being demonic; yet when I come eating and drinking and enjoying Life, you call me a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. There's just no pleasing you!'

Apparently, Jesus is confronted with a dilemma that you and I still face today: there are some people who just aren't *satisfied* unless they're being negative and critical. Yet as most of us know, being negative and critical really isn't all that *satisfying*! How much better Life goes when we strive to be positive; when we try to see and elicit the best in others, and in ourselves. That's how Jesus lives his life: with a joyful spirit of affirmation and acceptance - free from petty human judgments; yet fully human and fully aware of the differences and problems, needs and concerns of all those around him.

Although we rarely think about it, I imagine that Jesus had a healthy and Holy sense of humor! One that allows him to remain open and gracious in his interactions with others - especially those ungracious and rigid religious leaders of his day. Throughout history, humor has been used as a tool for getting through to obstinate or overbearing people - occasionally helping them to recognize the folly of their inflexible position. And though it sometimes gets lost in translation, the humor that Jesus uses still retains its original punch, for speaking truth to people in power!

For example, Jesus describes nitpicking, religious purists - who easily find fault with *others*, yet allow themselves all kinds of leeway - as people who “Strain at the gnat, and swallow the camel!” Just picture such a person, carefully picking a tiny gnat from his cup, yet somehow ignoring - and *swallowing* - an entire camel! That’s a comical, yet cutting image ! Or take Jesus’ premise, that before any self-righteous individual points out the minuscule speck of dust in another person’s eye, he first just might want to remove the enormous log that’s sticking out of his own eye! Far too often, people who hold tremendous religious or political power need a sharp reminder that the rules of fairness and basic human decency still apply to them.

Jesus displays a marvelous spirit of grace and compassion toward people who have been pushed to

the fringes of society. Yet he's quick to use his sharp wit to confront the hypocrisy of the religious and political leaders who push them there and keep them there. Today's New Testament reading is a good example of this. It's also a good example of the importance of taking our Faith seriously, while at the same time not taking ourselves too seriously! Our mission as the Church is certainly serious: helping people experience the Life-changing Love of our Divine Source! However, that mission isn't accomplished by critically picking people apart, but by compassionately picking people up, lifting their spirits, and encouraging their lives. When we look at Jesus, we see him doing precisely that. He helps people move from despair to hope; from doubt to faith; from oppression and fear, to openness and freedom.

Because of his remarkable connection with his Loving, Divine Source , Jesus can confidently connect with others right where they are. And by doing so, he helps them to lighten-up and to open-up to a Holy Spirit of Joy and Peace, Graciousness and Love. Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Much of what burdens the people of Jesus' day, is a heavy-handed religious structure that pushes people

down, and keeps God “way up there” - as a distant, yet demanding judge, just waiting for you to make a mistake. And as most of us know, it’s extremely difficult to live fully or freely, if we’re preoccupied with the fear of doing something wrong. So Jesus invites us to see and to experience the Holy One in a wholly different way: as One who gives us this wonderful gift of Life, and then simply asks that we lovingly share it with one another - fully and fairly, openly and joyfully.

That’s one of the wonderful things about this congregation. This is a community where people’s differences and diversity aren’t disparaged, but are welcomed and *celebrated!* It’s a place where all kinds of people - with a wide spectrum of beliefs - can feel comfortable worshiping and praying together, working and playing together, caring-for and sharing-with one another. It’s a place where we can hear and experience the *Good News* of Divine Love, embodied in genuine, down-to-earth people. People who know how to have a good time, as well as how to be there for one another in Life’s most difficult and painful times.

There’s certainly plenty of negativity and bad news in our world and our culture today. But let’s not forget that Jesus’ world and culture wasn’t all wine and rosaries! Maybe that’s why, in the Gospel according to John, the very first *sign* Jesus performs to indicate what his life and mission are all about, is to turn 6 huge stone jars of

water into 150 gallons of colorful, tasty, exhilarating fine wine! So when his uptight religious contemporaries vilify him for being “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners”, Jesus says “Thanks for noticing! Now why don’t you also lighten-up and get a life!”

This morning, you and I gather together to joyfully celebrate the Life of Jesus Christ:
The One who isn’t afraid to bring new life and joy to the stuffy religious traditions of his day;
The One who graciously accepts us where we are, and lovingly encourages us to be the best that we can be;
The One who reminds us that the Holy One who creates us, must have a pretty good sense of humor!
After all, just look at all of us!