

*Blurb: The God of my childhood was a supernatural being with no sense of humor at all. Yet for the human psyche, humor and laughter are nearly essential, providing welcome relief from some situations and a proven medical value.*

## LAUGHTER THE BEST MEDICINE

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Some people say today that this rock pillar is what is left of the poor woman. Good grief! That is one huge punishment for such a small crime.

But this sermon is about laughter, so let me show you this cartoon about that story:



and I want to tell this story about Lot's wife. The Sunday School teacher was describing that when Lot's wife looked back at Sodom she turned into a pillar of salt, when Bobby interrupted. "My mommy looked back once while she was driving," he announced, "and she turned into a telephone pole."

There is nothing like that little twist at the end to provoke laughter. I believe that laughter is the best medicine. Pratfalls are funny for some odd reason. Everyone falls harmlessly down the stairs in public at some point or another in their life, and everyone everywhere in every corner of the world is going to have something bad happen to them. The bottom line is life is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you react; you can choose to sit and sulk about it or you can laugh.

Here is a quote I ran across while putting this sermon together. I quote Katherine Mansfield Murry, 1888 -1923...a prominent New Zealand modernist short story writer who was born and brought up in colonial New Zealand and wrote under the pen name of Katherine Mansfield. She said:

*When we can begin to take our failures non-seriously, it means we are ceasing to be afraid of them. It is of immense importance to learn to laugh at ourselves.*

Here is one of my stories of vanity and laughing at myself. I was about 35 years old and nearly as bald as I am now when one winter a friend talked me into buying a full wig.



You see the results in this photo. Feel free to laugh. However, I also owned a small convertible sports car. When the weather warmed up, the first time I scooted down the highway with the top down, the wig blew up from behind my head and over my face. There was no doubt about it, either the wig had to go or the car had to go. The wig lost. So much for vanity. Several years later I adopted this funny little ponytail and have sported it around for about fifteen years now. I know some people look at it and laugh or snicker...but that's ok, I laugh at it too. I like it, and I am going to keep it.

"And here's another miracle," says the UU minister. "My car is destroyed but this bottle of wine didn't break. Surely we should drink the wine and celebrate our good fortune," he says, handing the bottle to the priest. The priest nods in agreement, opens the wine, drinks half of it, and hands it back to the minister. The minister takes it and puts the cap back on.

"Aren't you going to have any?" asks the priest.

"Not right now," says the minister. "I think I'll wait until after the police make their report."

So, laughing is considered a visual expression of a number of positive emotional states, such as joy, mirth, happiness, relief, etc. On some occasions, however, it may be caused by contrary emotional states such as embarrassment, apology, or confusion such as nervous laughter or the courtesy laugh.

Laughter is a part of human behavior regulated by the brain, helping us clarify our intentions in social interaction and providing an emotional context to conversations. Laughter is used as a signal for being

part of a group – it signals acceptance and positive interactions with others. Laughter is sometimes seen as contagious, and the laughter of one person can itself provoke laughter from others as a positive feedback. This may account in part for the popularity of laugh tracks in situation comedy television shows.

Here is something I will bet you did not know. The study of humor and laughter, and its psychological and physiological effects on the human body, is called gelotology. File that away in your trivia storehouse.

Laughter researcher Robert Provine said: "Laughter is a mechanism everyone has; laughter is part of universal human vocabulary. There are thousands of languages, hundreds of thousands of dialects, but everyone speaks laughter in pretty much the same way." Babies have the ability to laugh before they ever speak. And who among us can resist the sound of unrestrained giggles from children, like this?

*Youtube clip of Mom and Quadruplets laughing.*

Infectious isn't it? Provine argues that "Laughter is primitive, an unconscious vocalization." In a study of the "Giggle Twins," two happy twins who were separated at birth and only reunited 43 years later, Provine reports that "until they met each other, neither of these exceptionally happy ladies had known anyone who laughed as much as they did." They reported this even though they both had been brought together by their adoptive parents, who they indicated were "undemonstrative and dour." He indicates that the twins "inherited some aspects of their laugh sound and pattern, readiness to laugh, and maybe even taste in humor."

Religious cartoons can provoke laughter too, like this one:



This is taking two entirely different things and mixing them together in a surprising way to bring about a good chuckle...God doing doctor talk to Moses.

Kind of sounds like UU's doesn't it? We seem to have a habit of questioning things.

The following is borrowed heavily from the website "tcholidays.com" on essay writing

### **Some real Benefits Of Laughter**

Laughter is a physical expression of our pleasant emotions. Laughter comes after something you see, hear or feel. In an attempt to express the friendly inner feelings, a person eventually

bursts into laughter. Laughter is as contagious as a yawn. When laughter is shared, it serves to connect people and increases intimacy and happiness. Laughter is perceived as the best anti-stress medicine.

Also, laughter triggers healthy bodily physical changes. Besides, laughter serves to boost your energy, diminish pain and it strengthens your immune system. Good stuff, this laughter.

Laughter is affordable to all as it is priceless, easy to use and free. A good laugh works faster than any other medicine to bring the body and the mind back to balance. Some people think that humor and laughter are very essential for our emotional and physical well being. So here is a prescription for you: readily develop the habit to laugh frequently, it helps to enhance relationships, surmount problems and improve both emotional and physical health.

There are even more health benefits of laughter. Laughter enhances the relaxation of the entire body. A good laugh relaxes your muscles by relieving physical stress and tension. Laughter also facilitates the release of endorphins. You've heard of endorphins. They are your body's feel-good chemicals that help in reducing pain and promoting an overall sense of wellbeing. Laughter is the best boost of an immune system as it facilitates the eradication of stress hormones and increases the release of infection-fighting antibodies and immune cells. Also, laughter serves to protect the heart. A good healthy laugh facilitates the good flow of blood in the vessels which helps in averting cases of heart attack or heart failure and other related cardiovascular problems.

Laughter is pretty amazing when you stop and think about it.

Laughter generates a good feeling that remains locked in you even when you are through laughing. Laughter helps maintain an optimistic look even in the instances of disappointment and loss. In the cases of loss and life disappointments, laughter gives one the courage to find hope that helps you to forge forward. Since laughter is contagious, laughter can go a long way in raising the spirits and hopes of other people who are going through disappointing situations in their lives.

And talk about stress relief...

Stress is one of the worst enemies of human mental health. A good healthy laugh helps reduce sadness and emotional disappointments which in turn reduces stress. Humor and laughter shifts perspectives enabling you to avoid feeling overwhelmed thus promoting mental health.

Physicians at the office of Preventive Cardiology of the University of Maryland Medical Center described what they observed about laughter and its affects on the lining of organs and blood vessels ...."The magnitude of change we saw...is similar to the benefit we might see with aerobic activity, but without the aches, pains and muscle tension associated with exercise. We don't recommend that you laugh and not exercise, but we do recommend that you try to laugh on a regular basis. Thirty minutes of exercise three times a week, and 15 minutes of laughter on a daily basis is probably good for the vascular system."

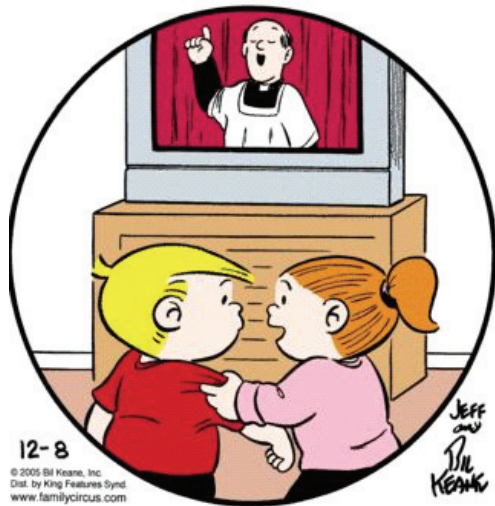
There is a mean side to laughter too. We humans tend to want to laugh in mean ways at things that happen to people we do not particularly like very much. I have our President in mind here. Many members of UU congregations just do not care much for this man in the oval office these days. But to demean him with ridicule is demeaning the office of the Presidency as well. When we get in the habit of scorn and ridicule about the current inhabitant it makes it a little easier to feel less respect for the office even when someone we like and agree with is holding the office. I just caution us to be a bit careful with this two edged sword called laughter when it comes to the Presidency. Argue with, yes. Disagree, yes. Resist those things you consider wrong yes, absolutely. Laugh and ridicule....well, maybe we should back off a little. I don't think that falls in line with the first UU principle about respecting the worth and dignity of every person.

Amen.....let us now sing our closing hymn for today...

#203...a soul cleansing song called "All Creatures of the Earth and Sky"

Benediction:

Let me close today with an End of sermon cartoon:



**"Hear that? People in heaven have ever-laughing life."**

Now admit it...wouldn't you like to have an ever-laughing life?

Amen, and Namasté.