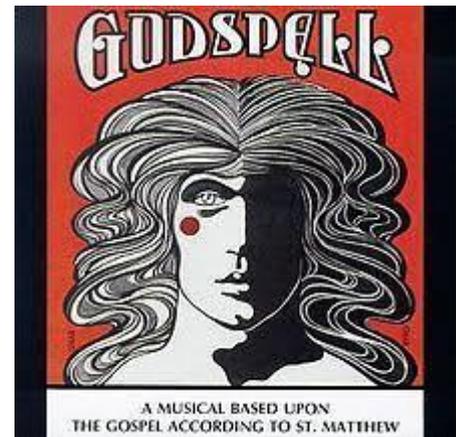


The Parish of Central Exeter

Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion
5th Sunday after Trinity: 11th July 2021

Did Jesus laugh? Was he funny?



Welcome everyone.

This morning we are not following the lectionary readings but instead, by referring to the Parable of the Good Samaritan, briefly reflecting on the above questions which were the title of a posting on a theological blog that I (Richard) follow. Thanks to Helen for finding the intercessions and to Sheila for choosing the music.

Preparing for worship

We gather:
a community of faith in God's subversive world.
We gather to celebrate
that no darkness can extinguish light,
to remember
that love will always be more powerful than death,
and to trust that peace
will always be stronger than violence.
We gather:
people of faith in the light of God's world.

(Cheryl Lawrie: posted on [hold this space])



Lawrence Garcia: Jesus the Jester

Gathering hymn

Our opening hymn is Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation. Words appear on the screen. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QQezNMfaL4>

Prayer for Conscience and Courage

Loving God,
lead us beyond ourselves to care and protect,
to nourish and shape,
to challenge and energize
both the life and the world You have given us.

God of light and God of darkness,
God of conscience and God of courage
lead us through this time
of spiritual confusion and public uncertainty.
Lead us beyond fear, apathy and defensiveness
to new hope in You and to hearts full of faith.

Give us the conscience it takes
to comprehend what we're facing,
to see what we're looking at
and to say what we see
so that others, hearing us,
may also brave the pressure that comes
with being out of public step.

Give us the courage we need
to confront those things
that compromise our consciences or threaten our integrity.

Give us, most of all,
the courage to follow those before us
who challenged wrong and changed it,
whatever the cost to themselves.

(Joan Chittister)

Assurance of forgiveness

Jesus, in extravagant compassion,
has already secured our forgiveness,
and calls us to live as those who are
renewed and thankful.

Receive this grace and share it.

We are so grateful;
we will go and live differently
because of what you, Jesus,
have done for us.

(www.sacredise.com)



Prayer

Eternal Spirit of the living God
Be for us the fountain of water
Creating and sustaining us each day;
be for us the enlivening wind
searching us out and scouring us clean;
be for us the refining warming flame
steadying and transforming our desires
that, lovingly and truthfully,
We may pray and we may live.

(Jim Cotter)

Worship music

'Through all the changing scenes of life' sung by the Chet Valley Churches. Words appear on the screen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBkorDtz1nU>

Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dreamed.

Our mouths were filled with laughter,
our tongues with songs of joy.

Then it was said among the nations,
"The Lord has done great things for them."

The Lord has done great things for us,
and we are filled with joy.

Restore our fortunes, Lord,
like streams in the Negev.

Those who sow with tears
will reap with songs of joy.

Those who go out weeping,
carrying seed to sow,
will return with songs of joy,
carrying sheaves with them.

Gospel: Luke 10, 25 - 37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

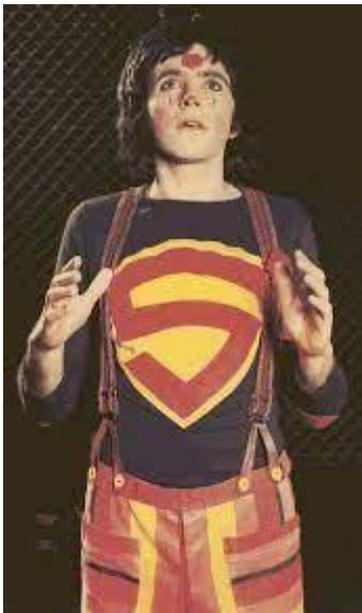
The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Reflection: Did Jesus laugh? Was he funny?

Self-evidently, the parable of the Good Samaritan is not a comic story. None of the parables is — each is a vehicle for conveying a moral truth, a spiritual insight, a behavioural challenge, a startling perspective on life and the like. But for years I've wondered if the usual reading of biblical stories in a somewhat po-faced manner does justice to how they were originally narrated: after all, Jesus is depicted in the gospels as quick-witted, snappily dealing with challenges designed to catch him out (though sometimes meeting his match as with the Syrophenician woman who challenged his Jewish exclusivity), and with a good line in satire (comparing hypocritical scribes and Pharisees with a 'whited sepulchre' or a 'whitewashed tomb' — beautiful on the outside but inside full of death).

A blog I follow recently had a posting on the subject, posing the two questions above: Did Jesus laugh? Was he funny? *



It reminded me of seeing the musical *Godspell* in the early 1970's, with David Essex as Jesus and Jeremy Irons as John the Baptist. Although theologically suspect (like its fellow blockbuster *Jesus Christ Superstar*, it ends at the crucifixion) it was a sympathetic portrayal which created a lot of laughter, especially in the first half that focussed on Jesus telling the parables. I remember in particular the witty portrayal of the priest and the Levite as they snootily 'passed by on the other side', and I find it perfectly plausible that Jesus would have worded his story to draw out derisive laughs of recognition from his hearers — how better to engage their attention and get them on-side before delivering the serious point of the story?

During the interval when members of the audience were encouraged to go on the stage and mingle with the performers, a friend I was with took the opportunity to tell a cast member that the humour was very like that of the Cambridge *Footlights* club, a major breeding ground of comedians over the last 100 years, and he asked if *Godspell* had taken its comedy ideas from there.

I immediately pretended I wasn't with him.

I don't think my friend was convinced by the affronted — and absolutely legitimate — denial by the actor of the plagiarism charge, but in a way he (almost) had a point, in that the humour in *Godspell* was broadly similar to the university/undergraduate humour which emerged in the likes of *Beyond the Fringe*, *Monty Python*, *Not the Nine O'Clock News* and *(Stephen) Fry and (Hugh) Laurie*, among others. *Godspell's* humour is of its time.



Despite the Good Samaritan parable itself not being comic, I can also envisage *aspects* of it being cast in other forms of humour: Music Hall, say, with the incomparable Max Miller: *Here, this is a good one. There was this fellow-me-lad told his trouble-and-strife he was just nipping out to Jericho on business, and she says, better be careful, there are some scary-looking Samaritans around... now here's a funny thing, 'cos this fellow ignores her and he only goes and gets beaten up, and he's lying on the ground completely naked — can you imagine that? Eh? What's your memory like, gal?*** —*

and guess who did it? Here, no! Got you there!... before moving on to the non-humorous essence of the story of what it means to be a true 'neighbour'.

Or how about a modern day, observational comedian like Michael McIntyre introducing it? *I mean, you really don't want to get beaten up on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho — well, I suppose you don't want to get beaten up on any road, come to think of it! But it's particularly embarrassing if it's the Jericho road because it's crawling with important people like priests and Levites* (he grins, saunters across the stage, enacts being leaped upon by an unseen assailant and falls to the ground). *And you know how there are some days when nothing seems to go right? You're lying there in a pool of blood, and along comes a priest and you think oh no, he's going to ask why hasn't he seen me in the synagogue for the last three sabbaths...*

Name your favourite comedian: Eric Morecambe? Paul Merton? Victoria Wood? Sarah Millican? Lenny Henry? Nish Kumar? Each of them in narrating the parable would have a different way of grabbing the listeners' attention with a laugh or two, particularly at the expense of the priest and Levite, before hitting the listeners with the big reveal that is the essence of the parable.

Okay, so Jesus wasn't a *Footlights* comedian or a Music Hall star or an observational comic: he's not even a regular host on *Have I Got (Good) News For You*, but with his acute insights, his ability with hecklers, his verbal dexterity, his challenge to oppressive authority figures, and above all his compassionate understanding of the human condition — with all that, he could teach funny-men and -women of all types and ages a thing or two about their art. Perhaps we should remember that when reading the parables, and not be too ponderous about them.

**the blog is at <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/did-jesus-laugh-was-he-funny/>*

*** a genuine Max Miller line...*

Winner

It was not the Word
we had been expecting.

Love had been the front runner
closely followed by hope,
peace, mercy and grace.

Faith had been popular,
as had justice. Reward
also had its supporters.

Then God created laughter
and all bets were off.

(Richard Skinner)

The Good Samaritan Intercessions

Lord, help us to love you in all that we do, that our characters might grow in Christlikeness.

We thank you that you are the God who blesses people with whom we disagree, who welcomes those we would exclude, who loves those we do not. And so we pray that our characters might come to reflect yours more faithfully.

When we are happy to judge, and dislike and hate others – simply on the basis of gossip, or ignorance, or laziness – forgive us. May we become people who offer practical and political love in a way that is not calculating.

When we have immunised ourselves to the distress of others, simply because our society has taught us to disguise our distress, and social conventions require that we conceal our weaknesses – give us discernment, and courage, and the capacity to listen well.

When we cross the metaphorical road to avoid doing the right thing, because we are afraid of the consequences, cause us to question our commitment to others and to you. Give us the courage to face up to the realities of our own cowardice.

Help us to see you as you really are, and to see others as they really are. Help us to hear you more clearly, that we might instinctively hear your voice in unexpected places. Help us to worship you more faithfully, that we might love more fully. To the glory of your name.

(posted on simonperry.org.uk)

The Lord's Prayer

Eternal Spirit, life-giver, pain-bearer, love-maker
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God in whom is heaven:
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe.
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world.
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings.
Your kin-dom of peace and freedom sustain our hope
and come on earth.
With the bread that we need for today, feed us.
For the hurts that we inflict on one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love
now and forever. Amen

(The Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness)

Affirmation

It takes little faith to see the sacred in the extraordinary.

To have faith that the sacred is in the ordinary, though,
takes courage to believe the mundane can be enough;
that grace can emerge
even through the dull,
the slightly disappointing,
the not quite right,
not quite as we intended,
not really what we hoped;
the clumsy,
the awkward,
and the imperfect.

Let your act of faith be to let what you do be enough.

Let what you do be enough...

(Cheryl Lawrie, posted on [hold this space])

The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate, accompanied by Nigel's setting of words by Richard, sung during the Peace at a recent service in St David's
https://youtu.be/i_tOtFtmaTM

A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing can separate me
from your love revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



An offertory prayer

We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.
We present ourselves, and our world,
as we are and as you can make us,
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and of your own do we give you.
Blessed be God for ever.



Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.

As we prepare for communion you might like to listen to John Bell's lovely "This is the body of Christ", also from a service at St David's: <https://youtu.be/ll50tOITYVs>

Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say:

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

Post Communion Collect

Eternal God,
comfort of the afflicted and healer of the broken,
you have fed us at the table of life and hope:
teach us the ways of gentleness and peace,
that all the world may acknowledge
the kingdom of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Commission & Benediction

You call us to be your light
in the darkness, your voice
in the wilderness, your hope
for the hopeless.
You give us
strength
in our weakness,
peace
and gentleness,
words
and boldness,
to proclaim
more of you
and of us, less.



(John Birch, posted on Faith and Worship)

Go, confident in the knowledge of God's steadfast love for you,
assured of the healing touch of Jesus upon you
and emboldened by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit within you.

(Moira Laidlaw, posted on Liturgies Online.)

Concluding music

For our final piece of music Sheila has chosen 'Come with Me, Come Wander' (or 'Sing hey for the carpenter') from the Iona Community. It is in the 1987 book 'Heaven shall not wait' which she has had for many years. The first is slower but does have the words. The second faster version from January 2015 has a choir singing in 2 parts at times. (It also has camels, and you may have to skip the ads). Take your pick.

Version one from Frodsham Methodist Church Cloud Choir with words on the screen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdFVsRAnA_o

Version two from a Senior Choir Anthem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEBaV3xtVY>