Sunday August 12, 2007

A TIME TO LAUGH Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
Annual Joke Sermon

Without being aware of it, Jim's sermon last weekend gave me the perfect setup and lead in for today's annual joke sermon. He based much of his sermon on one verse from the letter to the Colossians, chapter 3, verse 11, "Christ is all and in all." Jim went on to imply that there truly is no difference between the secular and the sacred because the loving energy we sometimes call God or Christ is in everything. So as a warm-up for today's sermon, I want to lead you in singing two songs which you might think of as secular songs but they are also sacred. The first is, "It Isn't Any Trouble Just to S-M-I-L-E." The second is, "The More We Get Together, the Happier We'll Be."

When Jim asked me last month to do one more annual joke sermon, I was reluctant. I told him that I had no new jokes. He said, "That's okay. You're the joke." I wasn't quite sure how to take that. Then I remembered what the Apostle Paul had written, "We are fools for the sake of Christ," (I Corinthians 4:10) so I figured I was in good company.

In tribute to our dedicated and creative church staff, I've written a few limericks in their honor.

There is a young pastor named Jim, who keeps himself athletic and trim,
He plays golf now so well, God may send him to hell
To help people there know how to win.

There is a young pastor named Jim, who confessed one day to his kin

I've tried all the lot and discovered there's not, one single original sin.

There is a young pastor named Barb, who gives her whole life to the Lord,

By clowning and teaching, and preaching and teaching, and helping us hear the good word.

There is a young woman named Tammy, so talented, skillful and canny,

She directs our TV, dreams up programs to be, she reminds us of Robert Devaney.

We have a good pastor named Nancy, she's loving and doesn't act fancy,

She moves fast in her wheelchair, and appears

everywhere, and yet she never seems antsy.

We have a musician named John, who is helpful in leading a song.

He plays the Lied Organ, in a musical jargon, and sometimes too loud and too long.

We have a new pastor named Sturdy, who sometimes tends to be wordy,

But that is O.K. He'll learn what to say, with brevity and yet not be nerdy.

Jokes and laughter can keep you from taking life, yourself and your religion too seriously. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned against being grim, gloomy and self-righteous in your religious practices. He said, "When you fast, do not look dismal like the hypocrites."

In our religious tradition, the experience of the loving presence of the Holy is described as being the guest at a joyous banquet where everyone is having a good time and the room is filled with laughter.

Of course there are things going on in the world and in your life and mine that want to make us cry. It is precisely in these times that we also need to laugh. There is a time to weep and a time to laugh.

A dad was passing by his son's bedroom and was astonished to see the bed was nicely made and everything was picked up. Then he saw an envelope, propped up prominently on the pillow that was addressed to "dad." With the worst premonition, he opened the envelope with trembling hands and read the letter. Dear Dad: It is with great regret and sorrow that I am writing you. I had to elope with my new girlfriend

because I wanted to avoid a scene with you and mom. I have been finding real passion with Stacy and she is wonderful. But I knew you and mom would not approve of her because of all of her piercings, tattoos, tight motorcycle clothes and the fact that she is much older than I am. But it's not only the passion...She's pregnant. Stacy said that we will be very happy. She owns a trailer in the woods and has a stack of firewood for the whole winter. We share a dream of having more children. Stacy has opened my eyes to the fact that marijuana doesn't really hurt anyone. We'll be growing it ourselves and trading it with people who live nearby for cocaine and ecstasy. In the meantime, we will pray that science will find a cure for AIDS so Stacy can get better. She deserves it. Don't worry dad. I'm 16 and know how to take care of myself. Someday I'm sure we'll be back to visit so that you can get to know your grandchildren.

Love, your son, John.

P.S. Dad. None of the above is true. I'm over at Tom's house. I wanted to remind you that there are worse things in life than the report card that's in my center desk drawer. I love you. Call me when it's safe to come home.

There's a time to weep and a time to laugh. The most wasted day of all is one in which you have not laughed.

You can get some of the best laughs from letters to newspaper advice columnists. A mother wrote to Dear Abby: Our son writes that he is taking judo. Why would a boy who was raised in a good Christian home turn against his own religion?

Dear Abby: Our son was married in January. Five months later his wife had a 10 pound baby girl. They said the baby was premature. Tell me, can a baby this

big be that early?

Signed. Wondering. Abby replied, Dear Wondering: the baby was on time. The wedding was early.

Dear Abby: I am forty-four years old and I would like to meet a man my age with no bad habits. Abby responded. So would I.

Dear Abby: I can no longer trust my husband. He is so unfaithful I'm not sure that our last baby is his.

A little boy in church for the first time watched as the ushers passed around the offering plates. When they came near his seat, he said loudly to his father. Don't pay for me, dad, I'm under five.

A minister was riding a bicycle for exercise in his neighborhood and he met a little boy trying to sell a

lawnmower. "How much do you want for the mower," he asked. The boy said, "I just want enough money to buy a bicycle." After a bit, the minister said, "Will you take my bike in trade for it?" The little boy asked if he could try it out first and after riding the bike for a while, he said, "Mister, you've got yourself a deal." The minister took the mower and tried to start it. He pulled the rope a few times with no response. He called the little boy over and said, "I can't get this mower to start." The boy said, "That's because you have to cuss at it to get it started." The minister said, "I'm a minister and I can't cuss. I don't even remember how." The boy looked at him happily and said. "You just keep pulling that rope. It'll come back to you."

A joke sermon would not be complete without a priest, minister and rabbi joke. A priest, minister and rabbi are playing poker when the police arrive and raid the game.

"Father," asks the officer, "were you gambling?" "Of course not," says the priest," after asking a prayer for forgiveness. "Pastor, what about you?" After an appeal to heaven, he answers, "No Sir." Turning to the rabbi, the officer asks, "Rabbi, were you gambling?" Shrugging his shoulders, the rabbi answers, "With whom?"

Have you ever wondered why priests, rabbis and ministers get together only in jokes?

Osama bin Laden dies. He's pretty excited. From his perspective, he's led a righeous life and has sacrificed for the glory of Allah, so he's looking forward to all the pleasures promised in paradise. He arrives and is about to enter and who should come forward but George Washington. George takes one look at Osama and

shouts, "You injured my country," and starts hitting and kicking him. "Ouch, ouch," says Osama, "What's going on?" Before George can answer, Dolly Madison appears and starts hitting Osama with a stick. Then George Mason, Sally Hemmings, Robert E. Lee and a lot of other people Osama has never seen before and they are all hitting and kicking him. He raises his head and asks St Peter, "What's all this? I was supposed to have date palms, rivers of wine and 72 virgins." "You misunderstood," said St. Peter, "It's 72 Virginians."

Late one foggy night, a Big Red Husker fan and a Colorado fan had a head on collision on a bridge on Interstate 80. Fortunately, both are not injured but their cars are in bad shape. "This is a sign," says the Colorado fan, "that we should put away our differences and live as friends instead of rivals." "You're right," says the Husker fan. He opens the trunk and takes out a bottle of

bourbon. "Let's toast our new friendship. The Colorado fan takes a big drink and hands back the bottle. "Your turn." "Nah," says the Husker fan, tossing the bottle over the bridge, "I think I'll wait until after the police show up."

A woman wins the lottery. She says to her husband. "I've got it made. Start packing." He asks, "Am I packing for cold or warm weather?" She says, "How the heck should I know? Just be out by the time I get back."

Here's a joke you won't understand without some biblical knowledge. When Adam stayed out late for a few nights, Eve became upset. "You're running around with other women," she charged. "You're being unreasonable," Adam responded. "You're the only woman on earth." The quarrel continued until Adam fell asleep, only to be awakened by someone poking him in

the ribs. It was Eve. "What are you doing?" Adam demanded. "Counting your ribs," said Eve.

Because this year is the 50th anniversary of my ordination, I want to make a few closing comments about religious life. After 50 years in the ministry, it is my impression that as a general rule, human beings never behave more badly than when they believe they are protecting God. God doesn't need our protection.

During these 50 years, I have come to prize holy ignorance more highly than religious certainty and to seek companions who have arrived at the same place.

My prayer: God grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked anyway, the good fortune to run into the ones I do, and the eyesight to tell the difference. Amen.