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# A God Who Laughs . . . and Weeps

BY PAUL ANDERSON

**D**O YOU THINK God laughs? Do you think God weeps? These are hard questions to answer with any certainty. But if Jesus indeed reveals to us what God is like, both of these questions may be answered with a "yes."

"Jesus wept." This is the shortest verse in the English Bible (John 11:35), but apart from that fact, it is far more noteworthy for another reason. It shows us the truly human side of Jesus. He loved His friend Lazarus and wept at his tomb.

Seeing the other side of Jesus' personality, we can imagine Him throwing His head back and enjoying a side-splitting laugh with the disciples in a boat on Lake Galilee. According to John 2:1-11, Jesus' first miracle served to enhance the merriment of the Cana wedding celebration. And, when Jesus set out to overthrow the powers of darkness, He used all weapons available—the casting out of

Daddy!" The boy was right. Jesus used humor far more than the common reader acknowledges, and He did so for good reasons.

For one, points made with humor are remembered better. Straining a gnat, but swallowing a camel; calling the self-righteous "white-washed tombs"—presentable outwardly, while decaying inwardly; a camel trying to pass through the eye of a needle; the absolutely ridiculous idea of trying to perform eye surgery on someone else while having a log in one's own eye—these are all unforgettable images precisely because they are so ridiculous. I would be surprised if anyone who has heard one of these anecdotes could ever forget it entirely. Aided by humor, Jesus' audience would warm to His message more quickly and retain it longer.

Another advantage of the point made with humor is that humor works like a plow. As the hearer of an unlikely anecdote finds himself laughing, he is being prepared unknowingly to start laughing at some ridiculous action or belief of his own. As the plow turns over the earth and prepares it to receive the seed, so humor exposes the undetected inadequacies and contradictions of our assumptions. Humor makes us receptive to the convicting power of truth.

"So, you want to blame your sins on your hands, your eyes . . . and other body parts; go ahead," says Jesus to His contemporaries, calling their bluff, "cut them off!" The ironic point being made is that sin does not originate with our body parts. It stems from our hearts. Here irony cuts through our defenses and confronts us at the core of our beings with the truth.

A third aspect regarding Jesus' use of humor that deserves attention is what it shows us about the Kingdom of God. Many of the parables are celebratory. They describe all Heaven rejoicing when a lost sheep, or a lost son, comes home and is found again. The Kingdom of God is like a festive banquet to which

the deserving are invited but refuse to attend. So the doors are opened to the masses, and the celebration of God's presence is experienced by all who simply respond to the invitation.

Ironically, the ones portrayed as missing the celebration are those good religious folk, or those so otherwise preoccupied by mundane matters, that they fail to perceive the presence of the Kingdom of Heaven right there—in their midst. Jesus shows us that the Way of the Kingdom is one of joy and celebration, as well as earnestness and commitment. And this is a lesson especially appropriate for us Quakers.

Finally, Jesus may have used humor because it is health-producing. Not long ago, Norman Cousins attributed his victorious bout with cancer to having surrounded himself with laughter-producing people, books, and films. He literally laughed himself back to health.

Now this is not to say that all illnesses can be cured this way, but it does imply that developing a gracious and positive approach to life can maximize one's own health as well as the health of those around us. A joke per day may indeed "keep the doctor away," but one is also reminded—and often—that it helps a great deal if the joke is, at least to some degree, funny. Therein lies the challenge.

We Quakers tend all too easily to be somber and serious, probably due to the weightiness of our convictions. But if our core aspiration is to embody the Kingdom of God here on earth, we are helped by the example of Jesus. Jesus reveals to us a portrait of a God who laughs and weeps. As we seek to become more like Him, may we be granted the freedom to do the same. **EF**

## Humor works like a plow

demons, healing the sick, preaching the Gospel . . . and utilizing humor.

In his book *The Humor of Christ*, Elton Trueblood describes his amazement at his preschool-aged son, as he broke out into laughter during a family Bible reading. They had just read the passage about not trying to get a speck out of another person's eye until one has first removed the beam from one's own, and when Elton asked him why he was laughing, he exclaimed, "It's funny,