

Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 14, 2020

Gathering

Liturgist: Let us worship the eternal God, the source of love and life, who creates us.

Liturgist: Let us worship Jesus Christ, the risen one, who lives among us.

Liturgist: Let us worship the Spirit, the holy fire, who renews us.

Liturgist: To the one true God be praise in all times and places through the grace of Jesus Christ.

Singing: 560 "We Praise You O God"

We praise you, O God, our Redeemer, Creator;
in grateful devotion our tribute we bring.
We lay it before you, we kneel and adore you;
we bless your holy name, glad praises we sing.

We worship you, God of our fathers and mothers;
through life's storm and tempest our guide you have been.
When perils o'ertake us, you never forsake us,
and with your help, O Lord, our battles we win.

With voices united our praises we offer;
our songs of thanksgiving to you we now raise.
Your strong arm will guide us; our God is beside us.
To you, our great Redeemer, fore'er be praise!

Reconciliation

Minister: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Liturgist: The peace of Christ be with you.

Liturgist: And also with you.

Minister: The proof of God's amazing love is this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.

Liturgist: Trusting in God's faithfulness and compassion, let us confess our sin before God and one another.

Romans 5:8, Hebrews 4:16 adapted

Silent confession and lament

- Singing: “Trisagion” Greek liturgy / F. Ortega
 Holy God, holy and mighty.
 Holy Immortal One, have mercy, have mercy on us.
- Liturgist: Since we have been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!
- Liturgist: Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received reconciliation.
Romans 5: 9-11
- Singing: 559 “Ten Thousand Reasons”
 Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul; worship his holy name.
 Sing like never before, O my soul; I’ll worship your holy name.

 The sun comes up, it’s a new day dawning;
 it’s time to sing your song again.
 Whatever may pass, and whatever lies before me,
 let me be singing when the evening comes.

 You’re rich in love, and you’re slow to anger.
 Your name is great, and your heart is kind.
 For all your goodness, I will keep on singing –
 ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.

 And on that day when my strength is failing,
 the end draws near, and my time has come;
 still, my soul will sing your praise unending,
 ten thousand years and then forevermore!
- Liturgist: Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.
- Liturgist: When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.
- Liturgist: Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”
Matthew 9:35-38

Proclamation

- Singing: 741 “Take, O Take Me As I Am”
 Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be;
 set your seal upon my heart and live in me.

Scripture: Genesis 18: 1-15

Sermon: "A Cosmic Comic"

Singing: "Psalm 126" I. Wardell ©2012

Our mouths they were filled, filled with laughter.
Our tongues they were loosed, loosed with joy.
Restore us, O Lord. Restore us, O Lord.

Although we are weeping, Lord, help us keep sowing
the seeds of Your kingdom for the day You will reap them.
Your sheaves we will carry; Lord, please do not tarry.
All those who sow weeping will go out with songs of joy.

The nations will say, "He has done great things!"
The nations will sing songs of joy.
Restore us, O Lord. Restore us, O Lord.

Dedication

Prayer

Benediction

Worship Leaders

Liturgist:	Ben VanderWeele
Liturgist/Percussionist:	Margot VanderWeele
Liturgist/Vocalist:	Chris Gabrielse
Pianist/Vocalist:	Erin Pacheco
Prayer:	Sam VanderWeele
Minister:	Roger Nelson
Sound Engineer:	Schuyler Roozeboom

Hymns found in "Lift Up Your Hearts" (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013).

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Text: Genesis 18: 1-15
Title: A Cosmic Comic
Date: 06.14.20
Roger Allen Nelson

In the Netflix series, “Comedians in Cars getting Coffee” Jerry Seinfeld drives some sort of exotic car to pick up a comedian, they drive around talking about comedy, and then continue their conversation over a cup of coffee. That’s it. Each episode is about 15 minutes long and I find them as addictive as Garrett’s cheese and caramel popcorn.

In one episode in Chicago, Jerry picks up comedian and talk-show host Steve Harvey in a 1957 black Chevy Bellaire Convertible with red and silver interior and a big rumbling V8. They drive around the city and end up having coffee at Manny’s Delicatessen and Cafeteria on South Jefferson.

When they sit down over coffee, Jerry asks whether or not comedy can be taught. “Is it teachable?” Steve Harvey shakes his head and says,

Nah, man. If you explain it to them it will make no sense. This is the most senseless profession on earth. I was born with this eyeball that sees everything different. Tragedy strikes. I got news for you. We have the jokes that night. Now we know that we can’t bring them to the public yet, ’cause we’ll get hammered. But in a room alone when it’s just us, we have the jokes already. Listen to me man, comedy is the one profession that is none transferable. Comedians can become great actors, but actors can’t become great comedians....

I love that. He pointed at the center of his forehead and says, “I was born with this eyeball that sees everything different.” Without that third eye that

sees the world slant,
sees the absurdity,
sees the incongruity,
sees the inappropriate,
sees the illogical,
sees the impossible,
there’s no comedy.

Now. That extra eye is also a curse. Many comedians are angsty wrecks who carry a lot of pain, but from there they see that things don’t add up and thus the jokes. You can’t teach that. (By the way, I think the same might be true for preaching. I don’t know if you can preach a third eye....)

Sarah was in the shadows of the tent doorway when she heard one of the visitors say,

“...about this time next year, Sarah your wife will have a son.”

And my guess is that she rolled her eyes and thought, “Not again! Not this crazy business about having a child!” The lines in her face were carved in disappointment from the troubles in Egypt and all that mess with Hagar and Ishmael. She’d heard this same nonsense better than twenty-five years earlier. She’d buried that hope. She was dry and barren. Her time had passed. To talk of it was like tearing off a scab.

But, this time, when she was just about to push down the pain and wipe away a familiar tear, she chuckled instead. After all...

It was no use crying; it was impossible.

It was no use trying; she was old, he was older.

It was no use hoping; it was ridiculous.

So, something rumbled deep down in her belly, worked its way up, and before she knew it Sarah was laughing until tears squirted out of the wrinkled corners of her eyes and ran down her leathery old face. She was going to have a son! Now, that was a good one!

Dear friends, for a moment there Sarah had the third eye of a comedian. The idea of a woman in her nineties having a baby was not congruous with reality. It didn’t match the known world and it tickled her funny bone. It should also be noted that when God told Abraham that at one hundred he would father a child, Abraham fell face down on the dirt and guffawed.

This central story of God picking one family to give a land and children, to work out God’s will and way in the world, to be their God and they God’s people is born in laughter, as if God was a cosmic comic.

But, here’s the thing: The Bible is chock full of incongruities and therefore chock full of chuckles. Over and over again – normal is disrupted by abnormal....

A baby is born to a barren old woman.

A virgin gives birth to a son.

God becomes man and is nailed to a cross.

A dead man is resurrected.

Your sins are forgiven and you are free!

The very Spirit of God is in you.

Jesus is coming back.

Over and over in scripture the status quo is unhinged by the unbelievable and yet we’re asked to believe, have faith, keep hope, and... and hold your laughter... this is serious business.

And I guess if you don’t see the absurdity. If this all makes sense. If fits nicely into a system. If it seems normal. If you think God is somehow keeping score and our efforts at piety tip the scales – then you’ve missed the punchline.

Because the hope of the gospel is that this world of trouble and terror, of politics and pandemic, of racism and refugee, of cancer and depression....

This world of sublime joy and unspeakable horror will finally and fully find meaning, transformation, and healing through God in Christ.

And a lot of days, dear friends, that hope feels incongruous with the reality that we experience. Maybe faith is more akin to laughter than we realize.

Does that seem too cynical?

Too overstated?

Too jaded?

Walter Bruggemann puts it this way:

Faith is not a reasonable act which fits into the normal scheme of life and perception. The promise of the gospel is not a conventional piece of wisdom that is easily accommodated to everything else. Embrace of the radical gospel requires shattering and discontinuity. Abraham and Sarah have by this time become accustomed to their barrenness. They are resigned to their closed future. They have accepted that hopelessness is normal. The gospel promise does not meet them in receptive hopefulness but in resistant hopelessness... And indeed, if no new thing can intrude, if newness must be conjured from present resources, the promise is truly nonsensical.....

Can we live with a faith that is rooted in nonsense?

Can we live with a faith of incongruity?

Our fear – like Abraham and Sarah’s – is that such a faith would only be wishing on a star, grasping after thin air, and wasting our lives on a flimsy hope. Our fear is that such a faith is only a festival for fools or a crutch for the weak. But listen again to the text:

...the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

To answer that there are some things that lay beyond God would be to circumscribe God to human expectations and human possibilities – and finally that would be no God at all, just a shadow of our own making. And yet, if there are no endings, no dead ends, no limits, no boundaries, no chains of normal – then God is free to be God.

And, if God is beyond our constructions, then

our faith isn’t in normal – it’s in newness,

our faith isn’t in possibility – it’s in impossibility,

our faith isn’t in sensibility – it’s in incongruity,

our faith isn’t in reason – our faith is in God.

our faith isn’t in death – it’s in resurrection.

And it is out of that faith that we would live over against the dominate narrative of our culture. We live with a different punch line. We live with a third eye.

Frederick Buechner writes it this way:

Is it possible, I wonder, to say that it is only when you hear the Gospel as a wild and marvelous joke that you really hear it all? Heard as anything else, the Gospel is the church's thing, the preacher's thing, the lecturer's thing. Heard as a joke – high and unbidden and ringing with laughter – it can only be God's thing.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.