



Theology Pub, Longview Presbyterian Church (June 18, 2019)

--Ron Naff

### THE BIBLE AND HUMOR

*The Bible refers to laughter almost forty times. More than half of those refer to scornful or empty laughter. No fewer than six of them come from the story about the birth of Isaac. The word humor doesn't even appear in the Bible, so there is no analysis or detailed theology of humor there. Scripture does, however, supply many examples and helps us to understand the uses of humor.*

1. Do you think God has a sense of humor? What do you think the psalmist meant when he wrote: "He who sits in the heavens LAUGHS!" (*Psalms 2:4*).
2. "Now when Isaac, which means 'he laughs', was born, Sarah said, 'God has brought LAUGHTER for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me'" (*Genesis 21:6*). Why was Isaac given his name? What was so "funny" about his birth?
3. "Humor is the art of seeing something 'out of whack' and putting it back 'in whack'" – **Dr. Seuss**, children's author. How does this help define the ministry of Jesus? Cite instances in the gospel when Jesus tried to put things back "in whack" by using humor.
4. "Gentlemen, why don't you laugh? With the fearful strain that is upon me night and day, if I did not laugh, I should die. You need this medicine as much as I do. -- **Abraham Lincoln**, 16<sup>th</sup> U.S. President (addressing his cabinet during the Civil War). With our current political turmoil, social and economic injustice, terrorism and climate change, how is this statement (lament, reflection, musing) by President Lincoln relevant today?
5. "Laughter, of course, can be strained, cruel, artificial and merely habitual. But where it is real, laughter is the voice of faith" -- **Harvey Cox**, theologian. Share an experience when in a social setting (yes, even in church) humor has been used? How do you know when using humor is inappropriate or in bad taste?
6. Suggested biblical passages for further consideration:
  - a. *I Samuel 16:1-13* – Samuel chooses the runt of the litter to be King
  - b. *I Kings 18:20-40* – Elijah mocks the prophets of Ba'al
  - c. *Mark 7:24-30* – Jesus responds to a verbal challenge by an immigrant
  - d. *Proverbs 17:16-28* – the behavior of fools (and others)
  - e. *Acts 12:1-16* – Peter's release from prison catches his friends off guard
  - f. *Luke 18:1-8* – parable of a widow pestering a judge for justice