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**Chalice Lighting**

"Let there be light!"   
     Let it shine in dark places,   
         in moments of pain,   
         in times of grief,   
         in the darkness of hatred,   
             violence,   
             oppression,   
        where there is discouragement and despair.

Wherever darkness is to be put to flight,   
     "Let there be light!"

Let there be laughter

Let it be heard in moments of sadness

In times of sorrow

In the darkness of boredom

Where there is depression and anxiety

Wherever sadness is to be put to flight

Let there be laughter

Hymn “Oh, when we meet in fellowship” (*See Insert*)

TFAA - KID’S JOKES

Person A: What is a volcano?  
Person B: A mountain with hiccups!

Person A: What goes hahaha, plop?

Person B: Someone laughing their head off.

Person A: Why did the cookie go to the doctor?

Person B: Because he was feeling crummy . . .

Person A: Where does the Easter Bunny gets his breakfast?

Person B: At IHOP

Q: Why can’t you tell a joke while you’re standing on ice?

A: Because it might crack up.

Q: In what school do you learn how to greet people?

A: Hi school.

Q: When do you stop at green and go at red?

A: When you’re eating a watermelon.

Q: Why did the banana go to the hospital?

A: It was not peeling very well.

Q: Why did the football coach go to the bank?

A: To get his quarterback.

Q: Why did the melon jump in the lake.

A: He wanted to be a watermelon.

Q: Why did the ice cream cone take karate lessons?

A: It was tired of getting licked.

Q: What do you call a bear with no teeth.

A: A gummy bear.

Q: What stays in the corner but goes around the world?

A: A stamp.

Q: Why did the girl nibble on her calendar?

A: She wanted a sundae.

Q: What animal can jump higher than a house?

A: Any animal. A house can’t jump.

Q: How do you spot a modern spider?

A: He doesn’t have a web, he has a website.

Q: Why are pianos hard to open?

A: The keys are inside.

Q: How do you mend a broken pumpkin?

A: With a pumpkin patch.

Q: What’s the only school where you have to drop out to graduate?

A: Skydiving school.

**Introduction to Offering (Doug Hober)**

Last week the church office received a call from the IRS, asking about a member of the congregation—I won’t say who . . .

“He stated on his income tax return,” said the official, “that he gave $5000 last year to the congregation. Is that correct?” “we will have to check our records. But let me say this – if he didn’t, he will!”

So now as we take our offering, let us give freely, generously, in accordance with what we reported on our income tax . . .

**Sermon**

Humor in Church? Sadly, no! The Catholic priest of my childhood was a very educated and friendly man, but completely unable to translate even the simplest joke into Latin…

However, I would like to point out that the Hebrew Bible (a.k.a. the Old Testament) contains the story of the [birth of laughter](http://www.hti.umich.edu/bin/rsv-idx?type=DIV2&byte=59262): God promised Abraham that a son would be born to his wife Sarah, but Abraham, being 100 years old at the time, fell on his face and laughed. "What! Shall a child be born to man who is 100 years old?"

When three mysterious strangers repeated the promise to Sarah, she laughed too. Theirs was a laughter born of scorn and derision. But when the baby was actually delivered, Sarah said: "God has made laughter for me. Everyone who hears my story will laugh with delight. Who would have said that Abraham and Sarah could have children, yet I have born him a son in his old age." And they named the child Isaac, the Hebrew word for laughter.

And that is the story of how laughter was born!

At my seminary, each class was opened with a short devotion. This usually was a short prayer, sometimes a guided meditation followed by silence, and sometimes similar to our candles of joy and concern where students shared their problems or successes. Lee Barrett, professor of theology, had his own special way of starting a class. Here is an example:

*Well, God, here we are again, confident that we are pretty profound spiritual athletes. After all, we must be heavy duty religious dudes, because we are enrolled at this fantastic seminary. It is a well-known fact that the admissions office has a special screening process to deny acceptance to the spiritually immature, the superficial, and the worldly-minded. Our admissions officer knows spiritual quality when she sees it, and for this we are thankful. We are especially grateful, Lord, that your spirit has protected us from becoming smug or complacent. Or has it . . .?*

*Admittedly, sometimes we gnash our teeth when our classmates receive more accolades on their exegetical papers than we do. And sometimes we get depressed when our friends’ sermons stir more passion than our own. And by the way, we do want a church with a big steeple . . .*

*Well, okay, so maybe we aren’t all that spiritually advanced. Maybe we are pretty much just like everybody else, capable of envy, pettiness, and ambition. Give us your spirit, Lord, to remind us that we are just like the people to whom we minister.*

*Amen*

Professor Barrett used humor in his devotions to “wake us up” before class starts. He always started with a hilarious introduction that had us laughing out loud. But before we knew it, we were in the middle of a very serious prayer. This “wake-up call” is in my opinion the best example for the use of humor in a religious setting.

There is an old saying *“The devil can’t stand the sound of laughter.”* Logic would imply that God loves the sound of laughter!

Already in the 16th century, the English parson and philosopher Robert Burton observed that *“Mirth purges the blood, confirms health, causeth a fresh, pleasing and fine colour, whets the whit, makes the body young, lively and fit for any kind of employment. The merrier the heart, the longer the life.”* Then Burton describes the three greatest doctors in history as *“Dr. Quiet, Dr. Diet, and Dr. Merryman.”*

Let’s see if this works for you: Listen to my favorite UU joke and tell me how you feel afterwards!

*A middle-aged man, a good Catholic, had saved all his life to be able to afford a sports car. Finally he has enough money to buy himself the latest model Lamborghini. He is very happy with his new acquisition, but he has one more wish: he wants his new car blessed. So he drives up to his church and asks the priest whether he could bless his Lamborghini for him. The father asks: What’s a Lamborghini? When the parishioner explains it, the priest explodes in anger: “Don’t you know that blessing is a holy sacrament? No way could I bless a profane object like a car!”*

*Unhappily, the man drives off. Although he understands the priest’s reasoning, he still wants a blessing for his life’s dream. So he decides to try a mainstream protestant church – after all, they are supposedly more liberal. However, he gets almost the same reaction. First the pastor asks “What’s a Lamborghini?” and then angrily refuses to bestow a blessing on the car because it would violate the meaning of the sacrament.*

*Desperate, the man now drives to a Unitarian Universalist church. He knocks on the minister’s door, and explained that he has this new Lamborghini, and that he wants . . .*

*But before he can finish the sentence, the minister exclaims: “Wow! Really? A Lamborghini? Can I see it, please???” The man is somewhat surprised, but he takes the minister outside and the walk all around the car. The minister confesses that he had always dreamed of a car like that; and finally asks the man whether he could take it for a ride around the block. “Just once, pleeeease?”*

*Well, the man agrees, and when the return from the drive, the minister is beaming with delight. He turns to the man and asks him what it was he had come to see him about. When the man explained that he wanted a blessing for his car, the minister responds: “I’d love to oblige you – but what’s a blessing?”*

Do you feel better --- or more relaxed --- now?

Some people are uncomfortable with humor, and feel that in church it is too irreverent. But we do not have to see humor and religion as antagonistic.

Humor reminds us of our fragility, our weakness, our humanity. It helps us learn humility. But it really is threatening only to the proud, the self-righteous, and the pharisaical who even today are inclined to crucify people who express joy and humor.

Btw, I just came across this statistic: Kids laugh 400 times a day, adults 15 times. What happened?

There are many very appropriate uses for humor in the church. For example, you can use jokes and funny stories to point out when people exaggerate, for example in this story:

*A man was given a tour of hell by the devil. “This is the area where we keep people who have violated the food taboos of their religion” says the Devil. “Behind this door are the Catholics who ate meat on Fridays. Behind the next door are Jews who ate pork. And behind the third door are Unitarian Universalists.” The man looks puzzled. The Devil clarified “They didn’t drink fair-trade coffee.”*

The exaggeration which makes this story funny serves as a kind of mirror in which we recognize ourselves. I have another story that reflects a fairly typical UU behavior:

*A visitor to a Unitarian Universalist church sat through the sermon with growing incredulity at the heretical ideas the minister expressed. After the sermon, a member of the congregation asked the visitor: “so how did you like it?” “I can’t believe half the things the minister said” sputtered the visitor. “Oh good, then you fit right in!”*

Or the following quip on UU-Philosophy:

*To have a few doubts is normal for the member of any religion.*

*To have many doubts is a crisis of faith.*

*To have constant doubts is a conversion to Unitarian Universalism.*

By poking fun at something, we might gently raise the awareness of where we might even be a little extreme. For example this famous two-liner:

*“Why does the Unitarian Universalist cross the road?”*

*“To support the chicken in its search for its own path.”*

Thus jokes can make you more aware of exaggerations and extremes. It’s a well-know fact that the jokes we like best—or hate most—have at least some truth in them. The following story is a good example:

*The copy machine at a UU church is broken. A disaster! It was Sunday, and no repair person could be found. But they desperately needed more copies of the Order of Service! Finally, a technically talented visitor found the problem. “It’s just out of paper. The flashing box says right here: Replace paper in tray 2. Sheesh, can’t you follow a simple instruction?”*

*He was answered: “If we were the kind of people who follow instructions, we wouldn’t be UU’s!”*

This way, humor might even be used to affect change. In can be like a mirror in which we see ourselves how we really are. For example, UU’s sometimes seem to forget that we are a religious movement, as the following story illustrates:

*It is show and tell day at the school, and the children were requested to bring an item that represented their religious beliefs. David stands up and says: I am a Jew, and I brought a star of David. Dorothy stands up and says: This is a crucifix, I am Catholic. Jimmy gets up and says: I’m a Unitarian Universalist, and I brought a coffee urn . . .*

I know this is funny, but it is a reality that children are often affected by our lack of religious definition, as we can learn from the following true story:

*A UU family moved into a new neighborhood. Their little girl soon finds a playmate, and they are happily getting to know each other. One day, the playmate says: “We are Episcopalians, what are you?” The UU child thinks for a while, and then says: “I’m not sure, but I think we are League of Women Voters.”*

Raising your kid as a UU also has unexpected consequences:

On the first day of school, your first-grader might have to hand the teacher a note from you, stating: "The opinions expressed by this child are not necessarily those of his parents."

Isn’t it much better to use humor to get a message across? Of course I could preach a twenty minute sermon on UU identity, but I’m willing to bet that you will remember the jokes a lot longer than the message of a sermon . . .

Another use for humor is to nicely counteract negative approaches from people of more traditional religious persuasions; for example in the following dialogue:

*Person A, a mainstream protestant, says: I hear that you allow all kinds of weirdoes in your church, atheists, Buddhists, Pagans . . .”*

*Person B, a Unitarian Universalist, answers: Oh yes, and Christians too, we are very open-minded.”*

Finally, when talking to outsiders who don’t know much about Unitarian Universalism, you can use a joke to explain UU thoughts and actions. You know, what former UUA-president Sinkford called our “Elevator Speech.” The light bulb story is a perfect example;

*How many UU’s does it take to screw in a light bulb?*

*Well, we choose not to make a statement either in favor or against the need for a light bulb. However, if you, in your own journey, have found that a light bulb works for you, that is fine.*

*You are invited to write a poem or compose a modern dance about your personal relationship to your light bulb and present it next month at our annual light bulb service.*

*We will explore a number of light bulb traditions including incandescent, fluorescent, and three-way, long-life and tinted; all of which are equally valid paths to spiritual luminescence.*

Humor is also very important for us, the ministers. A famous spiritual advisor of the 19th century, the French abbot Henri de Tourville, gave depressed and stressed-out clergy who sought his council the following advice: *“Don’t take yourself too seriously; don’t dwell on your past; don’t look back; don’t waste time and energy analyzing yourself.”*

I think what he means is that it’s a good idea to laugh about yourself occasionally. You won’t loose any of your dignity – and you will feel better!

*By the way, do you know what you get when you cross a Jehovah’s Witness and a Unitarian Universalist? Someone who comes and knocks on your door for no apparent reason.*

Of course, it goes without saying that any time you use humor in a presentation or conversation, you want to make sure that your jokes don’t offend or hurt anyone.

You can and should actually use our Seven Principles and Purposes as guidelines. For example, the inherent worth and dignity mentioned in the first principle will obviously steer you away from ethnic jokes and discriminating language. Jokes that are offensive to a group of people, from “dumb blonde” jokes to those with ethnic or racial overtones would definitely violate this principle. Harmful humor also includes jokes that ridicule beliefs and values. For this reason I would never have used jokes about another religion for my sermon today.

The principle of “acceptance and encouragement to spiritual growth” is where our UU jokes come in. Of course, like anyone else, Unitarian Universalists definitely do not like to be categorized as one homogeneous group. However, as we have seen, humor can point to bits of truth and allow us to laugh at our own idiosyncrasies. If you look in the mirror of humor, you can recognize where growth is necessary, without being offended or angry.

That reminds me, we were are talking about coffee-hour earlier. I have a question for you:

*If you drink decaf coffee, does that make you a UU-Light?*

You can use humor to express a concern without reinforcing stereotypes, attacking opponents, or putting down people’s rights to their own beliefs, when you affirm and promote the principle of the “rights of conscience and the democratic process.”

One of my concerns as a minister who has to write sermons for a very diverse, and usually very educated audience, is that there is a danger of being too intellectual. The following story illustrates this quite well. It also might help to explain why some people have a hard time with us UU’s:

In this story, *Jesus asks his disciples: “Who do you say I am?” And behold, a Unitarian among them answered and said: “You are the kerygma behind all myth. You are the incarnate logos. You are of one substance and co-eternal with the Father or the Mother, as the case may be. You are the eruption of eternity into the space time!”*

*And Jesus looked at the Unitarian and said, “What?!”*

You can find countless religious jokes on the Internet. Many of them poke fun at UU’s, but no denomination is exempt. The fact that there are so many of those jokes is a clear indication in my mind that there is a spiritual side to laughter. Rabbi Marc Gellman, whom I met on Long Island, talks about the necessity for spiritual balance. He says that spiritual balance is more a practice than a belief.

His suggestion is this: for every moment you spend thinking of your burdens, your shortcomings, your worries—spend the exact same amount of time thinking about your joys, blessings, and gifts. That’s spiritual balancing. Rabbi Gellman calls spiritual balancing one of the three secrets of life. I haven’t had time to research the other two, but I won’t worry about it . . .

I’ll leave you with a final story, to help you with Your spiritual balancing: It’s from one of the Simpsons’ episodes:

Three boys are in the school yard bragging about their parents. The first boy says, "My Dad is a poet. He scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a poem, they give him $50." The second boy says, "That's nothing. My Dad is a composer, he scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it lyrics, they give him $100." The third boy says, "I got you both beat. My Mom is a UU minister. She scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, she calls it a sermon, and it takes four people to collect all the money!"

**Closing words**

by Dostoyevsky

If you wish to glimpse inside a human soul and get to know the man, don’t bother analyzing his ways of being silent, of talking, of weeping, or seeing how much he is moved by noble ideas. You’ll get better results if you just watch him laugh. If he laughs well, he is a good man. All I claim to know is that laughter is the most reliable gauge of human nature.

***Alternative Closing words*** *(the ones I couldn’t find…)*

For all of us who are seniors, for all of you who know seniors, and for all of you who will BE seniors, it pays to be able to laugh about it when you are  speaking of senior moments**:**

"Where IS my SUNDAY paper?"   
The irate customer called the newspaper office   
loudly demanding to know   
where her Sunday edition was.

 "Ma'am," said the newspaper employee,   
"today is Saturday. The Sunday paper is   
not delivered until   
tomorrow... on Sunday."  
   
There was quite a long pause on the other end   
of the phone, followed by a ray of recognition,   
as she was heard to mutter,   
"Well, snap, that's why no one was   
at church today."