

# Heavenly Humor

You got a speck in your eye!



The Speck & the Beam Matthew 7:1-5

St. Mary's Church  
Stone Harbor, New Jersey

Sunday April 15, 2018



We Welcome You to Join Us  
For the Adult Forum and  
Worship

All Year Long (well, almost)!

In my ancient seminary days, laughter was crucial to our survival, yet it always seemed "naughty." Many are the spiritual directors who hinted that a little more piety, a deeper spirituality, would have lifted us above the need for "frivolity." Ironically, that mentality often made the merely funny story seem hilarious. Strange. We always claimed our faith was the ultimate source of all human joy and delight. Yet, in practice, we so often seemed ill at ease with humor and the sound of laughter. Why is "religion" made so solemn, so serious, so sad? Why, if something sounds like fun, is it already suspect? Why do we make holy heavy? Why is it so hard to believe that heaven resounds with the sound of laughter? For a couple of Sundays, we are going to discuss "heavenly humor" - humor in our religious lives, in the Bible, in the New Testament, and Jesus' humor.

*Do you have any answers to these questions?*

How does the Bible refer to humor, comedy, and laughing?  
Are these things really just some kind of concoction...  
or is there a legitimate basis for humor in Scripture  
and the Church?

Dr. Samuel Upham was a professor of theology at Drew University many years ago. He died in 1904 at the age of seventy. In his last hours, he was lying on his bed, surrounded by friends. At one point, it seemed that he had died, but one woman touched his feet and said, "No, he's not dead. Feel his feet. They're warm. No one ever died with warm feet." At that, Dr. Upham opened his eyes and said, "Joan of Arc did!"

Now, here was a renowned professor, a theologian, who until the last breath he took, was inspired by joy and mirth. I wonder - where did he get such humor?

*Theologically or biblically, who do we blame for humorless religion?*

Trueblood's small book opened my eyes to a neglected aspect of understanding the life of Jesus Christ. Elton Trueblood was born December 12, 1900 in Iowa, the fourth of five children, and was graduated from William Penn College in Iowa in 1922. A Quaker theologian, Trueblood's writings and teachings had a lasting impact on Christians throughout the world. He died December 20, 1994 at age 94. In his lifetime he published 37 books. *The Humor of Christ*, now a classic, was published in 1964. Elton says in the preface to his book *Humor* that the idea that Jesus was humorous came when he was

trying to have family devotions one night. His eldest son was four years old, and Elton was reading to them out of Matthew 7. As he read along, feeling very serious about the weighty subject matter of that portion of Scripture, all of a sudden, his young son began to laugh. Elton says he tried to shush his son and admonish him against laughing at Scripture. His son objected, "But Dad, the picture is funny!" Elton says he looked down at what he had just been reading and saw that in fact, his son was correct. The image that Jesus had painted with words was indeed preposterous. It was the image of a man with a trunk of tree sticking out of his eye, trying to remove a speck of sawdust from the eye of a friend. The very idea is ludicrous (p. 9). "There are numerous passages . . . which are practically incomprehensible when regarded as sober prose, but which are luminous once we become liberated from the gratuitous assumption that Christ never joked. . . . Once we realize that Christ was not always engaged in pious talk, we have made an enormous step on the road to understanding."(p.10)  
*Does this complicate your understanding Jesus?*

**H**ere are four kinds of humor Trueblood identified:  
**sarcasm, satire, hyperbole, and invective (biting humor).**

When Philip tells Nathanael that the Messiah has been found Philip **sarcastically** replies, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46)

Jesus, as Nathanael approaches to meet him says, "Here is a true descendant of our ancestor Israel. And he isn't deceitful" ! (John 1:47, CEV)

The **sarcasm** comes from the fact that Israel's original name, Jacob, meant someone who is full of guile or who deceives. Jesus, playing off Nathanael's criticism, is humorously noting that, finally, an Israelite has been found who is not like his ancestor!

In another place Jesus nicknamed Simon "Rocky"— the weak, unstable, emotional little pebble of a guy, who rebuked Christ and later denied him three times. It's **satire** -- like calling a fat guy "Slim." It's also ironic, and it was meant to gently tease Peter.

Jesus loved good **hyperbole**. In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus wove a marvelous extravagance: "And why do you look at *the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye?*"

Jesus even used **biting humor**. Jesus makes fun of the way the Pharisees eat, pray, fast, tithe, and make oaths. He makes fun of their flashy and extra-long prayer tassels. "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel,"

Jesus said, referring to the Pharisaic practice of carefully straining their drinking water through a cloth to be sure they wouldn't swallow even the smallest of ceremonially unclean animals. In other words, in keeping the letter of the law and not its spirit, the Pharisees were letting in massive impurities.  
*Why did Jesus use humor in these ways?*

**T**here are some humorous episodes in the Bible. Are you aware of -

- In the days of Israel, a prophet challenged the priests of Baal to a showdown. When Baal did not deliver, which prophet in I Kings 18 suggested that Baal was perhaps "relieving" himself?
- Eutychus is mentioned as being overcome by sleep and falling out a window. Whose talking put the youth to sleep?
- Which child's birth was apparently so funny that the announcement of his impending birth caused his parents to laugh?
- Which apostle's appearance was so surprising that the servant girl forgot to let him in?
- Here is another Bible hero with an obvious weakness. Who planted a vineyard and got drunk?
- Let's shift focus to something more odd than humorous. Why was Saul an odd choice to be the first king of Israel?
- It is not every day an animal begins to talk. Who actually had an argument with his donkey?

1. Elijah 2. Paul 3. Isaac 4. Peter 5. Noah 6. From smallest tribe 7. Balaam