

Holy Humor Sunday



First Congregational Church of Anoka
United Church of Christ
an Open and Affirming Congregation

April 7, 2024

This bulletin is designed to assist you as you watch our livestreamed worship service, whether you follow along live or view it at a later time. The stream can be found on our YouTube channel at this location:

<https://www.youtube.com/@AnokaUCC>

Welcome & Announcements

Centering Music

Don Shier

The Church Bell Rings

* Opening Hymn

C. McArdle

The tune is "Deck the Halls!"

Fill the room with sounds of laughter, ha ha ha ha ha, ha ha ha ha!
Let our joy fill all the rafters, ha ha ha ha ha, ha ha ha ha!
Holy Spirit, bless our gath'ring, ha ha ha, ha ha ha, ha ha ha!
Fill this space with holy clam'ring, ha ha ha ha ha, ha ha ha ha!

Godly wisdom seems so foolish, ha ha ha ha ha, ha ha ha ha!
That our Lord did die seems ghoulish, ha ha ha ha ha, ha ha ha ha!
But our God does get the last joke, ha ha ha, ha ha ha, ha ha ha!
Christ is risen, Jesus is woke! Ha ha ha ha ha, ha ha ha ha!

Joy we know at Christ's rebirthing, ha ha ha ha ha, ha ha ha ha!
This Good News fuels so much mirthing, ha ha ha ha ha, ha ha ha ha!
Sing we all, and make we merry, ha ha ha, ha ha ha, ha ha ha!
Spread the love, be not contrary! Ha ha ha ha ha, ha ha ha ha!

We Come to the Table

Welcome and Invitation

One: May the Lord be with you.

Many: And also with you.

One: May your hearts be lightened and filled with God's love!

Many: We lift up our hearts and praise God above.

One: Let us give thanks to God, our Mother and Father.

Many: We glorify God – it isn't a bother!

One: It is right and good-ful; holy and wonderful; blessed and joyful;
to thanks you O God, Almighty and faithful.

It's you who has given us this worship time,
filled with laughter, humor and rhyme.

It's you that has shown us your holy love,
sent to us from heaven high up above.

And so, with your angels who first sang your song,
we shout out your goodness by "singing" along:

Many: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,

Heaven is filled with your marvelous glory;

Earth is filled with your limitless light.

Blessed is the one who comes in your name –

"Hosanna on high!" we loudly proclaim.

One: Holy God, it's your Son we remember today,

Jesus Christ, the anointed, whom we try to obey.

He encouraged the poor and freed the oppressed,
and told us you care about the distressed.

Through his suffering, death, and resurrection,
he taught that your grace beats out our imperfection.

He ascended to Heaven and sits beside you,

But remains here with us in all that we do.

Words of Institution

One: On the night he was taken, he lifted some bread.

He blessed it, and broke it, and here's what he said:

"This is my body to you that I give.

Take it; share it: in you I will live.

From now on, whenever, wherever you meet
remember our time when this bread here you eat."

When supper was over, he then took the cup,

With praise and thanksgiving he lifted it up:

"For the New Covenant, this is my blood;

a sign of the Lord's continuing love.

God has forgiven your every mistake,
so trust in God's love when this drink you partake."
May we offer ourselves for God's greater glory,
And proclaim what we know of this fabulous story:

**Many: Christ Jesus—he died, but then rose again!
He'll return here on earth: Hallelujah! Amen.**

Blessing

One: Holy Spirit, come down on us gathered here,
With this bread and this fruit of the vine please appear.
Make holy this food, fill us with your grace,
so we proclaim gospel to the whole human race.
We love you, Lord Jesus, we'll shout out again
your glory and honor:

Many: Amen and Amen!

*The elements will be brought to you in the pews.
Please partake as you are served while the music plays.*

Communion Music

Don Shier

Prayer of Thanksgiving (unison)

One: Let us pray.

**Many: We thank you God, for inviting us here;
to this Table where grace drowns out all fear.
Be with us now as we play and we pray,
Abiding with us throughout ev'ry day.
Amen!**

A Time for Children (10:30)

Prayer of Preparation

"Amen, Amen" #161 (alt lyrics)

(refrain) Amen, amen, amen, amen, amen!

Jesus died and rose again **(amen)** / Mary found him waiting **(amen)**
on Easter morning! **(amen, amen, amen!)**

Easter brings us joy **(amen)** / joy and laughter **(amen)**
Let us all rejoice! **(amen, amen, amen!)**

Like a fiery phoenix (**amen**) / Jesus lives again (**amen**)
This is truly Good News! (**amen, amen, amen!**)

Special Music

“Will the Circle Be Unbroken?”

Ada Habershon (1907)

Anoka UCC String Band

*There are loved ones in the glory, whose dear forms you often miss;
When you close your earthly story, will you join them in their bliss?
(refrain) Will the circle be unbroken by and by Lord, by and by?
In a better home awaiting in the sky, Lord, in the sky.*

*In the joyous days of childhood, oft they told of wondrous love,
Pointed to the dying Savior, now they dwell with him above. (refrain)*

*One by one their seats were emptied; one by one they went away;
Here the circle has been broken. Will it be complete one day? (refrain)*

Scripture Reading – Luke 24:6-11

‘Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’ ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Many: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Hymn

“Go Tell It on the Mountain” #154 (*alt.*)

**(refrain) Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere,
Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus is alive.**

**While soldiers watched the gravesite that quiet Sunday dawn,
there came a big commotion and then the stone was gone. (refrain)**

**The women found no body, their spices to anoint;
instead they found an angel, God's message to appoint. (refrain)**

**Go from where he isn't, to where he said he'd be.
An Easter-time reunion: the hills of Galilee. (refrain)**

Offering

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You can support the church further through the RaiseRight program: www.raiseright.com. Our unique church ID is gWKLGX8TRZCN.

Offertory

Don Shier

* Doxology

DIX

“For the Beauty of the Earth” #28 v.4

**For the good that love inspires, for a world where none exclude,
For a faith that never tires, and for every heart renewed.
God of all, to you we raise this our hymn of grateful praise!**

* Prayer of Our Savior (unison)

The Prayer has many versions; pray whichever you desire.

But remember: if you're a debtor or a sinner, it takes the trespassers longer to finish the prayer.

Our Father/Mother/Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

* A Psalm of Joy (Psalm 114 by Christine Robinson) and a Closing Prayer

One: When we were freed of all that oppressed us and gave ourselves to the Holy One,

Many: The moon smiled, the waters laughed, and the mountains skipped like rams and the hills like young sheep.

One: What tickled you, moon, that you smiled, O waters, that you giggled?

Many: You mountains that skipped like rams and you little hills like young sheep?

One: It was nature's glad notice of the liberation of her offspring,

Many: and a welcoming of her children home.

One: Let us pray.

Many: Holy Spirit, unleash within us the power of holy humor, of sacred laughter.

When the world is getting us down, and all seems to be filled with sorrow and worry, remind us of the foolishness of the Gospel. Fill us with divine delight that you chose responded to the death of Jesus in the most nonsensical way

possible: by restoring him to the world. What silliness is this, O my soul? And yet it is your way, Loving God, to turn our mourning into dancing and confound all of our expectations. We thank you! Amen!

* Easter Acclamation

“Now the Green Blade Rises” #238 (v.1)

**Now the green blade rises from the buried grain;
Wheat that in dark earth for many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again like wheat that rises green!**

Postlude

Don Shier

Acknowledgements

The Communion liturgy was written by Allie Scott and found at this URL:

<http://hackingchristianity.net/2014/11/right-and-good-ful-holy-and-wonderful-a-dr-seuss-communion-liturgy.html> (adapted CGM)

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Sermon Text

The best compliment I ever got was when I left a temp job at State Farm in late 1999 or early 2000. I was working as a mail-and-file clerk in this quiet, cubicle-laden office where they processed claims. Despite my protestations of being an introvert, I did make an effort to get to know each of the claims reps in my half of the office. If I didn't have anything else to file or deliver, I'd wander about and chat with folks as much as was seemly. At the end of a few weeks of that job, everyone in that division signed a card for me, and the boss's secretary told me, “We're going to miss you so much! Before you were here, there wasn't any laughter in this office.”

While that was an uplifting compliment, it also made me sad. No laughter in the office? I've worked in just enough corporate jobs that I can totally see how that works out, and it's a tragedy. What is life without laughter? Without joy that makes you interject to the whole world? Without holy amusement and fun?

I get that it's not everyone's thing. Loud expressions of emotion aren't always welcome. Some people receive them as disruptive and even embarrassing. I remember one time when I thought the same. I was seven years old, and we were starting to share the news that my mom was pregnant again—and with another set of twins, to boot. We had gone to Omaha to see my mom's parents, and it was a Sunday morning at my grandpa's UCC church. My parents let my two brothers and me be the ones to tell Grandpa, so during coffee hour we walked over to where he was sitting and told him the good news. I almost ran

away when he exclaimed loudly and energetically, enough so that no one in the room could possibly have missed it!

I hope that as I have aged, I have learned the wisdom to know that we all need such joy and laughter in our lives, even if sometimes we miss the mark and utter a groaner instead of a chuckler—though I am prepared to die on the hill that groaners are absolutely worth the effort. For instance: recently in Bible study, we were reading the story in Exodus about manna appearing on the surface of the ground in the morning. I think it's funny already that "manna" literally means "what is it?" I think that's a great joke! But that wasn't where I went with it. The instructions from God were for the people to gather just enough manna each day to feed their families—no more, no less. The unit of measurement is called an "omer." But on Friday, in anticipation of the Sabbath, they were to gather two omers of manna, enough to feed their families through Saturday so that they wouldn't have to do work on the Sabbath. Did you know that there's a name for that double omer? It's called an **omer pile**.

This is an odd Sunday where it's a bit of a struggle to find a Scripture lesson from which to preach. Admittedly, that's not my usual practice. I use a lectionary most of the time so that I am encouraged to reflect how the Spirit might be speaking to us today through an already-chosen reading, as opposed to having something I want to say and hunting for a reading to match it. Today, in my search for something about laughter, it turns out there's not a lot to work with, and a lot of it sort of undermines my point. For instance, there's the bit about God promising Sarah that she will give birth to a child while in her 90s. Both she and Abraham laugh about it, but she gets in trouble. Perhaps she's getting the last laugh when she names that child "Isaac," which means *laughter*. Beyond that there just isn't all that much. Jesus says in Luke, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." But that's a statement about the misery of their current lives. It's not a scene of frivolity. There's the infamous scene in Mark after Jesus gets arrested, and we read, "A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked." Now, I think that's hilarious, but I don't assume most other people do.

I do have to share what I think is the funniest passage in all of Scripture, though it appears that most commentators think it's just an odd story that establishes that the prophet Elisha's power is just as profound as Elijah's:

[Elisha] went up from there to Bethel; and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, 'Go away, baldhead! Go away, baldhead!' ²⁴When he turned round and saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD. Then two she-bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys. ²⁵From there he went on to Mount Carmel, and then returned to Samaria.

Yes, it's violent. And yes, the notion of mauling a pack of little boys is more than a little shocking. But it's just all so *specific*! Not just "a few" boys, but *forty-two*. Did the author of 2 Kings know that was the answer to life, the universe, and everything? And not just bears, but *she-bears*. All because these little boys are making fun of Elisha's baldness! Maybe this is just one of those moments where we can't do anything but laugh at something that otherwise leaves us confused or even weeping.

I wonder if Mary went off to weep after she brought the Good News to the other disciples, or if maybe she went off to her bedroom and just punched the pillow a bunch of times. I know if I were in her place I'd be pretty cheesed off, too. "Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words

seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.” An idle tale? Ugh. I don’t have a hard time imagining that the boys outright laughed in the face of the women. Jesus risen? Preposterous! The tomb was empty? Ridiculous! It reminds me so much of the noncanonical Gospel of Mary, where in one scene, Peter scorns Mary’s testimony because Jesus wouldn’t have possibly shared his secrets with a woman instead of a man!

But as we all know, Mary got the last laugh. After the boys ran to the tomb to see for themselves what Mary had claimed, they left. So it was Mary alone who stood outside the tomb, weeping, and then she met two angels. Immediately after that, Jesus himself appears to her. In that moment, her sorrow turns to joy. Her confusion turns to clarity. And her weeping turns to laughing! Oh, the author of John doesn’t describe it that way, but wouldn’t she have simply burst out in gobsmacked delight? In true, holy humor that something so foolish turned out to be true?

In his letters to the Corinthians, Paul writes of the foolishness of God. He affirms that “God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” (1 Cor 1:25). This is a belief that can make us laugh in joy! So much of this Story we’ve inherited relies on laughable foolishness. To be exalted, you must humble yourself. A master is no greater than their slave. From death comes life. The last shall be first. The poor shall inherit the earth. It’s almost a comedy routine, it’s so laughable! But that holy foolishness is the Gospel. It’s the Good News. It’s all designed to get us to laugh in incredulity at how ridiculous it all sounds, but eventually, we come to understand that God’s comedy points to a higher truth: that in God’s beloved realm, all those things that we devise to separate us from each other fall away. All of the artificial, arbitrary rankings and pecking orders we create so that some might have power over others simply evaporate. And the silliest thing of all? Jesus showed us that we can create that world *here and now*. Oh, it’ll make folks laugh, and not always the laugh of joy. But when we manifest that world? All of that scorn will truly become delight.

I’ve always liked to think that the Good News as we proclaim it here at Third and Main makes a lot of people laugh. On a particular day each and occasionally in the mail, that laughter is scornful. But I know it for truth that when folks drive by our church and see our visual proclamations of radical hospitality, some of those folks will laugh. Perhaps it’s first in disbelief. But when they realize that there’s a Church out there that means it and puts their reputation on the line, that laughter does turn to joy. Maybe some of those folks end up coming here, but for me, that’s just the bonus. The true Good News is that the Gospel as we understand it brings comfort to more people than we can possibly imagine. It brings joy to countless folks. Laughter bubbles up in the hearts of those who thought they would never find affirmation and love from a church, and it makes their lives just a little bit better.

Feel free to laugh at the notion that sometimes, loving our neighbors is just that easy.
Amen.

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