

January 10, 2021

Good morning,

Psalm 2.4 "He who sits in the heavens laughs..."

Psalm 37.13 "The Lord laughs..."

Psalm 59.8 "You, oh Lord, laugh..."

Embedded within the character of God is laughter. But how does that translate to preaching?

We've all seen stand-up comedians weave their clever monologues over a receptive audience. The performer and the crowd are quickly in perfect sync—he speaks, they laugh, he speaks, they laugh. Time flies, yet no one notices. Attention spans stretch. Grins abound. Happiness reigns. Wild applause.

And we wonder, "*Do I dare try that in church?*"

Comedy comes in multiple flavors—satire, absurdity, etc. However, the most popular genre might be what purists call *paraprosdokian*—a Greek word meaning *against expectations*. It's the art of taking an audience in one direction, then cleverly making a U-turn for a surprise ending.

Here are some classic examples of *against expectation*, and the wits who delivered them:

- "She got her good looks from her father ... he's a plastic surgeon." Groucho Marx
- "I didn't attend his funeral ... but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it." Mark Twain
- "He has no enemies ... but is intensely disliked by his friends." Oscar Wilde
- "He's a self-made man ... and he worships his creator." John Bright
- "I have never killed a man ... but I've read many obituaries with great pleasure." Clarence Darrow
- "He has Van Gogh's ear for music." Billy Wilder
- George Bernard Shaw sent a note to Winston Churchill: "I am enclosing two tickets to the first night of my new play. Bring a friend ... if you have one." Churchill's reply: "Cannot possibly attend first night, will attend the second ... if there is one."

Using unexpected humor in the pulpit is a tricky proposition. At times, nothing sparks an audience quite like a well-placed laugh. But the Sanctuary is not a comedy club—it's God's house. Are worship and humor mutually exclusive?

Charles Spurgeon pastored the massive Metropolitan Tabernacle in London for 38 years, and, in the process, rocked England with his powerful preaching while using the language of the every-day man.

However, in London, in the late 1800's, preaching in "the language of the every-day man" was *against expectation*.

The London critics sharpened their barbs and took aim. "His preaching is nothing short of ginger-pop sermonizing." Another said, "His coarse anecdotes are not what we expect from our clergy." A secular magazine wrote, "He uses alehouse slang in our most sacred shrines." Spurgeon's single defense was, "If you only knew what I was thinking but DIDN'T say!"

Fighting expectations of the pulpit is an ongoing assignment. Presenting the gospel to a jaded culture requires using every tool we possess. Jesus thought so too.

Don't get me wrong; I'm not saying the Lord began his sermons with Knock-knock jokes. Humor was different back then. Irony, exaggerations and absurdities were what made an audience laugh. And Jesus was a master at each of them.

Even His enemies were impressed: "Never has anyone spoken like this man." And children, the world's most transparent critics, sat on His lap to hear every word.

The prophet Isaiah called the Savior "a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief." And, of course, He was. The cross was never far from His thoughts. His horrific death was why He came, and He knew it.

But He also knew learning about God should be a joy—and it was, every time Jesus stepped to the platform. He broke the mold of perceived expectations. And, as Luke reported, "All the people got up early in the morning to hear Him speak in the temple." His teaching was fresh, "and not as the scribes."

In 2021 let's follow some new expectations ... let's follow His. Enjoy your saints. Give them reasons to believe. Ignore the detractors. Laugh. Love the children. Finish the work God called us to do.

Blessings, and happy New Year,
Pastor Lucero