

“A Time to Laugh”  
Ecclesiastes 3: 1- 8  
Makemie Presbyterian Church  
May 10, 2009 Mother’s Day

3For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

<sup>2</sup>a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

<sup>3</sup>a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

<sup>4</sup>a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

<sup>5</sup>a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

<sup>6</sup>a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to

throw away;

<sup>7</sup>a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time

to keep silence, and a time to speak;

<sup>8</sup>a time to

love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

This ends our reading.

Good morning. Today is a time of laughter in our life together. It is a Sunday of celebration. This morning, we will recognize the graduating seniors, welcome into our church family in an official way, Gere & Dianne Wilson, worship together & enjoy my favorite day, Mother's Day.

Have you noticed how hard it is to have a simple joyful event anymore? Something inside wants me to blame it on some external factor like political correctness run amuck. But like most things it's not that simple. We live in a fallen world of complicated joy.

Special times like Mother's Day or Father's Day remind me of this sad reality. While I intend to preach a "happy little sermon" about moms or dads, the complicated reality of our broken world jumps up & bites me. There are those moms or dads who have been abandoned or abused by their parents & the last thing they want to do is give thanks or hear nice things about something & someone they don't have. In addition, there are those who have wanted & prayed & waited to be moms & dads without success & with deep wounds. Suddenly, what seemed to be so simple & important jumps up has the joy stolen from its moment. Our concern for the wounded often

leads us to forego the rejoicing, tone down the celebration, or issue all sorts of exception statements so the wounded won't get further injured. Meanwhile, those who have reason for joy have a lot of it siphoned away. Well, not today.

As Christian communities I believe our churches need times of joy. Yes, there are those in pain who have been victimized by bad parents. Yes, there are those who ache to have children of their own & who find what is missing hurtful on these kinds of days. But, I believe we sometimes need to celebrate these kinds of moments without apology. Let me share a few reasons why.

We need to honor those to whom honor is due. In our petty & nit-picky world, people seldom get the affirmation & praise they deserve. Standing up & honoring those who deserve praise, well, especially in our life of faith together, there is a season to do so & I think, it must be done – it's just not an option for godly people. God wants us to honor those to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7).

And our children need to know that in the troubled world in which they often find themselves, there are moments of joy to cherish

& to anticipate. How do they know what "normal" should be, or what goal to set for their own lives if all they hear about are the exceptions & the injuries? How else will we help teach them to be kind & compassionate; to think on lovely things & to reach for them in their own lives (Phil 4:4-9).

So often in caring Christian communities, our focus is on the broken, the wounded, the left out, & the injured. This is appropriate & righteous in the truest definition of that biblically rich term. We must be communities of care & compassion. But we also must maintain a healthy & holy balance. Thanks for our blessings, praise for the greatness & graciousness of our loving God & in appreciation for the Almighty's response to our pleas for help & healing should also be a part of our worship. A compassionate community will lose its compassion if it forgets the joy that inspired it.

We must rejoice with those who rejoice in addition to weeping with those who weep. (Romans 12:15) There is a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, & a time to dance. Our celebrations are of complicated joy at church. But even though it may be complicated, rejoice!

Now some of you email me jokes about children in worship service mortifying their parents. Here are a couple of examples.

One of the Sunday school teachers was helping to prepare the children in her first grade class for worship so she asked them,

'Why is it important to be quiet during the church service?' One bright little girl blurted out, "Because people are sleeping!"

A second Sunday school teacher suggested that the children write letters to God. We have a few examples:

Dear God, 'Maybe Cain & Abel wouldn't fight so much if they had their own rooms. It works with me and my brother.' Mikey

Dear God, 'In Sunday school they told us what you do. Who does it when you go on vacation?' Leslie

Dear God, 'How did you know you were God?' Elizabeth

Dear God, 'Who draws the lines around the countries?' Tom

The famous passage from the book of Ecclesiastes that Ted read a moment ago, says, "For everything there is a season & a time for every matter under heaven; A time to be born & a time to die, a time to laugh & a time to weep."

But the seasons of the spirit don't seem to come in a pre-determined order, like summer, fall, winter & spring. Our inner seasons get mixed up, & sometimes they blend into one another adding, confusion to the mix of tears & laughter.

It's not uncommon for people at a wedding ceremony to start laughing. I've had nervous bride's get the giggles during their vows, while at the same time the groom was weeping.

The seasons of love & laughter, times to laugh & times to cry, often get mixed up-it's a big emotional mix. You parents who will be attending these seniors high school graduation know what I'm talking about. Laughing because, somehow your baby has made it all the way through school, weeping because, life as you have known it will forever be changed.

Humor-the right kind of humor, which is the ability to laugh at ourselves & to laugh with another-is one of the great virtues, whether we characterize it as such or not. How many times have we heard a person described as having 'a great sense of humor?' It's not only an admirable quality it's an aide to good spiritual health.

It wasn't so long ago that people thought that religion & humor didn't go together. But you all often tell me that you love the fact that we laugh together in church.

And it's paradoxical that humor helps us to be serious. Think about it--humor helps us to lighten up so we can get through a difficult time. Humor takes the edge off some of life's very serious struggles. We need to lighten up so we can take responsibilities, commitments & obligations seriously. It lets the light of spontaneity into the proceedings. And genuine, healthful & healing laughter is spontaneous. From time to time we all smile for the camera, or smile or laugh at a joke, to be sociable. But we need to be free to laugh without willing it, forcing it or controlling it.

Most laughter between pulpit & pew is spontaneous. I rarely plan to say something funny. Too many planned laughs can make a sermon a form of entertainment. But a sermon needs to be more. Although the word entertainment is rooted in the Latin verb *tenere*; to hold on to; to hold a person or group's attention; to cause to endure. And that definitely adds to the bottom line, doesn't it?

Too much sermon humor can be inappropriate, of course. But without a sense of humor the preacher appears grim, maybe even pompous. Laughing together can be very healing. During wedding preparation, along with all the other things we discuss, I try to encourage laughter. It's an important aspect of a good relationship, laughing together. Marriage is such serious business & if you can laugh together it can be an added glue for a relationship.

So this Mother's Day, I hope the sermon has some laughter. I save humor sent to me which I think might help to lighten up a day, or a sermon. For example, someone sent responses to the perennial question: "Why did the chicken cross the road?"

Here are some responses:

(This is John's favorite) Ralph Nader: The chicken's habitat on the original side of the road had been polluted by unchecked industrial greed. The chicken had to cross the street just to survive, but he never made it across because he was crushed under the wheels of a gas-guzzling SUV!

Dr. Seuss: Did the chicken cross the road? Did he cross it with a toad? Yes, the chicken crossed the road, but why it crossed, I've not been told.

Ernest Hemingway: "To die in the rain. Alone."

Grandpa: "In my day, we didn't ask why the chicken crossed the road. Someone told us that the chicken crossed the road and that was good enough for us."

Barbara Walters: "Isn't that interesting? In a few moments we will be listening to the chicken tell us, for the first time, the heart-warming story of how it experienced a serious case of molting and went on to accomplish its life-long dream of crossing the road."

Bill Gates: "I have just released eChicken 2010, which will not only cross roads, but will lay eggs, file your important documents, balance your checkbook, delete the SPAM from your email in less than a 1,000 of a second & guard against those henhouse viruses."

Colonel Sanders: "I missed one?"

"To everything thing there is a season; a time to cry & a time to laugh."

Happy Mother's Day. Amen.