

May Theme

Humor: The Practice of Connection

“A day without sunshine is like.....night!”

~Steve Martin

Introduction

Humor is an interesting word. It comes from Old North French “humour” meaning liquid or dampness. Ick, not very funny. The Ancient Greeks believed in humoral medicine which taught that the balance of fluids (humours) in the human body, controlled human health and emotion.

What is it about humor, comedy, laughter, being or feeling funny, that connects us? It is a fundamental human drive to form bonds with one another, and humor can serve as a tool to communicate reciprocal liking and understanding to other people. Humor can create a bond by giving a sympathetic, shared voice to our experience of the world in all its pain and silliness. We may remember and feel the impact of a sermon much more acutely when our ministers share life stories that reflect an ability to find the humor in past experiences that we can all relate to.

Humor has a huge social function. It is a way of communicating that can forge relationships in the most awkward and tense situations like the drunk driver and the cop in the You Tube Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPTro9FuhCA>. There is intimacy and sharing that comes with humor and laughter. Humor allows the discovery of our common human connection by sympathetic observation of the world in all its pain and silliness.

Sometimes being humorous depends on the shared understanding of codes of behavior and societal traditions. What is funny in one culture may not be funny in another. What is funny in one time period may not be funny in another. The codes and traditions we live by become funny when they are twisted or the rules are changed. Humor is empowering because it makes acceptable a change in attitude towards the rules and traditions of a culture in a way that lessens their restrictions. What is funny is the shared ability to mock these expected norms. Humor takes what we know and makes it unexpected. There is an experience of letting go of attitudes and feelings we might not have known we had.

Humor also fosters connection because it can serve as a release valve for tension, awkwardness, and fear. It is a way of turning on the light in times of darkness. “If you laugh at something you can deal with it” Joan Rivers said after the suicide of her husband. Humor and laughter (which has been shown to release endorphins in the brain) can act as a buffer against stress, disappointment, disagreements, and rough patches that every kind of relationship goes through. Humor can take the gravity out of the human condition and put things in perspective. Humor can

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also be used as a shield. Someone who is constantly “on” and communicates solely by joking is not connecting. Shortly after his death Joan Rivers said of Robin Williams that you could never get to really know him because he was always being a comedian.

Humor *depends* on connection. You have to really engage with other people in order to laugh with them.

Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:

1. How does humor connect us? Can it disconnect us? Explain.
2. How has humor empowered you in your life?
3. Has humor ever changed your attitude about something? Describe.
4. Have you ever been in a situation where humor was your only way to deal with painful emotions? Describe.
5. Describe a time when humor helped you to connect to another person or to a group of people.
6. Does attempting humor in a tense situation make you feel vulnerable? Explain.

Quotes and Short Readings

“When humor works, it works because it’s clarifying what people already feel. it has to come from someplace real.” Tina Fey.

“Humor is a social lubricant that helps us get over some of the bad spots.” Steve Allen.

“Those who knew Lincoln described him as an extraordinarily funny man. Humor was an essential aspect of his temperament. He laughed he explained, so he did not weep.” Doris Kearns Goodwin.

“A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership, of getting along with people, of getting things done.” Dwight D. Eisenhower.

“There is nothing like a gleam of humor to reassure you that a fellow human being is ticking inside a strange face.” Eva Hoffman.

The Worship Associates are: Carly Baker, Alexandra Businger (chair), Alan Cantor, Margaret Homer, Jess Jonas, Maria Kempner, Julien Lafleur, Megan Momtaheni, Jennifer Ollington, Nevin Shanabrook, and Gary Strichartz.