

## “Last Laugh”

### Sermon – June 14, 2026 Stone Presbyterian Church

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Laughter is a funny thing—pun intended. Why do we laugh? Why do we like to laugh?

Humans laugh primarily as an evolutionary social tool to bond and signal safety. While commonly associated with humor, we are actually 30 times more likely to laugh when we’re around other people than when we’re alone. Laughter serves as a universal form of communication that eases tension and establishes trust.

We see this when something is funny—we expect one thing but are surprised by something different or incongruous. This is generally how comedy works. But it also happens in life, like you see on the television show, “America’s Funniest Home Videos”

But there is also “nervous laughter”, an involuntary coping mechanism to help you manage emotional overload or diffuse awkward situations. You may have experienced this yourself. For example, maybe you’re hammering a nail but hit your fingers instead and your wife starts laughing. She tells you she’s not laughing at you but always laughs when she gets anxious. So she says.

And then there’s the cruelty laughter. Laughter that not everyone shares, particularly when it comes at the expense of another. When a bully and his friends make fun of a differently able person and laugh at them. They laugh because they enjoy the suffering of others. This is particularly highlighted in the movies when the arch villain laughs at something terrible they are going to do to others. The Joker in Batman movies may be the most obvious. Lack of empathy, narcissistic arrogance, gloating over their superiority.

The Bible does mention laughter in places, but only a few times where it says people actually laughed. We heard in last week’s gospel lesson

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where the people laughed in derision when Jesus said the girl was not dead but sleeping. The Psalms have God laughing at the wicked. But it's really only Abraham and Sarah who laugh first out of disbelief and then joy.

Today's Old Testament passage from Genesis 18:1-15 has three “men” show up on Abraham's doorstep, as it were. Now from verse 1 and the next chapter we learn that one is the LORD and the other two are angels.

Abraham runs around going above and beyond to show them hospitality.

Then one of them, presumably the LORD, says, “I'll come back next year and your wife Sarah will have a son.”

Now Abraham was 99 years old and Sarah 89, so her normal childbearing years were long in the past. Thus, we hear in verses 12 and 13, “So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure? The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh [when I said this]?” He then reaffirms his promise and says, “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?” After he is done, verse 15 concludes our lesson today with “But Sarah denied, saying, ‘I did not laugh’; for she was afraid. He said, ‘Oh yes, you did laugh.’”

Now Sarah gets called out for laughing at the prospect of having a child, but she is in the tent and laughs \*to herself\*! And to hear only today's passage it sounds like she is the one with disbelief and Abraham is the faithful one.

But in the previous chapter, chapter 17, God comes to \*Abram\* and makes his covenant that he will be the father of many nations. Then he changes Abram's name to Abraham and his wife's name from Sarai [suh-RYE] to Sarah and says she will have a son from whom will come many nations.

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Then verse 17 says, “Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, ‘Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’” This is almost exactly what Sarah says. But God makes no comment on it and simply reaffirms his promise and that the child’s name will be Isaac, which in Hebrew means, “he laughs.” Even God plays it for laughs.

So, we can give Sarah a little break. And it seems God did also. The LORD’s response when she denied saying she laughed, seems more like parent playfully mocking their child, *[playfully]* “Yes, you did laugh!” And that was it; no other admonishment or consequence.

Then after an interlude of Sodom and Gomorrah, Sarah does conceive and bear a son in chapter 21 and in verse 6 says, “Now Sarah said, “God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.”

So, all’s well that ends well. Well, except Sarah then kicking her Egyptian slave, Hagar to the curb with her son Ishmael out of jealousy. But that’s a story for another day.

The message of today’s passage then is not that Sarah didn’t have faith but rather the LORD’s rhetorical question in verse 14 of today’s passage, “Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?” To which the answer is, “No.”

This concept extends to the gospel lesson where Jesus gives his authority to his 12 disciples and send them out as apostles—messengers—to proclaim the good news and to basically heal people and do so without payment.

God promised Abraham he would be the ancestor of nations and subsequently through Isaac and Jacob, to be the God of the chosen people of Israel. But as the Old Testament prophets preached, the rulers and the people often lost their way.

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Picking up where John the Baptist left off then, Jesus seeks with his disciples to restore the balance and well-being among Israel that had been lost. The work of healing, restoration, and justice is not confined to Jesus alone; it is entrusted to his followers—which includes us!

Just as Jesus found hypocrisy, injustice, and oppression with his people, so too today we found the same thing among Christians. We are called go about working toward restoring people to wholeness—socially, spiritually, and physically. Jesus’s commissioning of the Twelve challenges us modern disciples to see faith as active participation in God’s integral mission of restoration and reconciliation.

Many Christians today are trying impose legalistic interpretations filtered through their lens of worship of power. They seek not to change because they have received the good news, but to force others to do as they see fit, to have a fixed set of instructions to go by that serve their interests.

Don't things like honesty, compassion, justice, and love say more to us today than worrying about someone’s sexual orientation or expression, for example? How I wish that were a rhetorical question.

And yet, as Paul tells us in today’s epistle lesson from Romans 5 we have hope because our sufferings produce endurance, producing character, producing hope, which does not disappoint us because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

While we may not be able to laugh about it exactly, we can look at the challenges that the world throws at us, and smile just a bit knowing that God will keep his promise as he did for Abraham. Maybe not on the timeline we would like, but will keep it just the same. And we know this because as verse 8 says, “But God proves his love for us in that while we

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still were sinners Christ died for us.” He didn’t do that just to give up on us.

Now that doesn’t mean to always be naively optimistic. Studies have shown that to be happier rather than trying to be more positive, it is more important to reduce the negative. While it’s important to stay informed, don’t get dragged down by the constant barrage of outrageous behavior, fear, and hate that our media constantly are bombarding us with and with the algorithms look to lock us in.

As licensed professional counselor Jeff Guenther, says, “Stop trying to be positive — just stop feeding the negative.”

So, as disciples of Christ, go out as apostles, proclaiming the good news and healing people in ways that we can.

Like Sarah—and Abraham—we can laugh at God’s promises but in the end, it will be God who has the last laugh when he says, “See? I told ya!”

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.  
Amen.