

“HOW TO LAUGH AT THE FUTURE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Proverbs 31:25-31; Psalm 2:1-6

Prayer: Holy Father, grant us your enabling grace to hear your Word, to believe your Word and to apply your Word. Don't let there be a planting only, but also a harvest. Don't let us be hearers only, but doers. For your glory and for the sake of Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.

Introduction.

This is a pretty challenging Mother's Day for several reasons. For some mothers their children and grandchildren can't come and visit or have dinner or share the day. For some mothers that would put their health at risk. You have to settle for phone calls and cards.

For other mothers it is sort of an opposite problem. They have all the kids are around all the time and the added stress of trying to figure out homework and homeschooling and juggle everything else. I am hearing some stories of real tension and burnout. Rather than have everyone around, you would like a little peace and quiet, a day off from being mom.

On top of the home and family concerns come added financial pressures, added relational pressures, and depressing news 24/7.

Then there are those who wish they could be moms and those who have lost their moms.

To call this Mother's Day happy might be a stretch. For some there isn't a lot to be happy about, not much to laugh at.

So a sermon with the title, How to Laugh at the Future, comes off sounding rather pie in the sky, especially on Mother's Day 2020. For some thoughts of the future make us sad or want to cry.

And it's not just moms. All of us have been overtaken by the unknown and this particular version of the unknown has a lot of death associated with it. Life seems more risky now than ever. Covid-19 has created a future that is fearful. How can we laugh at that?

Proverbs 31:25

I want to focus on one particular aspect of this godly woman's character and nature. *She laughs at the time to come, she laughs at the future.* Who says that about anyone these days, especially in these Covid-19 days.

This is not a trait belonging only to godly women or wives or mothers. This is a trait I aspire to, one I certainly have wrestled with in the last couple of months.

What are we afraid of?

What do we fear? What do we not want? What do we hope doesn't happen and are working hard to make sure doesn't happen?

What we are afraid of controls us and our thoughts, our actions and attitudes, our decisions, our plans. What we are afraid of becomes like an idol, like a god to us.

If you fear what others think or say about you, that will control you, dominate your thinking and influence your actions. Peer pressure is real and powerful.

If you fear missing out, FOMO is the acronym in the social media world, that will control you and how much time you spend on your screens, your smart phone, texting, posting, checking Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, TikTok.

If you fear how your appearance is coming across, or fear being perceived in certain ways, that will control how you present yourself, your clothes, car, house, vacations.

If you fear how your kids will turn out, that will overwhelm you and dominate the kind of parent you are.

If you fear having enough money, that will control you and dominate your thinking and influence your actions, your work, what you do, how much and how long and what you do with it.

If you fear failing or losing your job, that will keep you awake at night. I have been down that road. How would I provide for my family, pay the mortgage, pay the tuition bill? That overwhelmed my thoughts for a long time. Looking back it was a mirror from God to show me my fears, my idols, my gods, my lack of faith and trust.

If you fear this virus, it will control you, dominate your thoughts, affect everything around you, keep you bound up.

If you fear death, that might be the greatest fear of all. That is perhaps the greatest fear in our world. This is the fear that drives all others. How can we protect ourselves from death and keep it away for the longest possible time?

We have reasons to be worried and fearful, lots of them. Money issues, health issues, family issues, kid issues, what's going on in our country. I get it, we all have lots of reasons we could decide to be worried or fearful.

But, we all have even more reasons and better reasons not to be worried.

What is the secret to laughing at the time to come, at laughing at the future?

This woman knew the secret. It starts with the fear of the Lord. The is the foundation, the fear of the Lord is the secret to wisdom and faith and laughing at the future.

She had the fear of the Lord, and the fear of the Lord overcomes every other fear. No fear is a match for God and for the fear of God.

In the Bible we read of the laughter of fools that reveals their folly and the laughter of the righteous that reveals their confidence in God.

We see both kinds of laughter implied in the David and Goliath story. What was going on in that story? Fear was the dominate emotion, fear was controlling the day. The army of Israel was lined up against the army of the Philistines and one Philistine had the whole army shaking in their boots.

Who was the army of Israel looking at? Goliath. Who was David looking at? The God of Israel.

“How dare you defy the armies of the living God of Israel, don't you know who He is and what He can do?” Goliath laughs at David in ridicule and derision. David laughs at Goliath in utter confidence in God.

I Samuel 17:45-47 Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. ... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, 47 and that all

this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.”

This is not bravado, this is not youthful arrogance, this is not foolish bluster or boasting. This is simply faith, a faith that is practical, faith that expresses itself in confident trust in God.

What are we looking at? Goliath 2020 or the living God of eternity who laughs?

Did you know God laughs? Of course He laughs, where do you think we get our ability to laugh from? We are made in the image of a joyful, supremely happy and laughing God. God is the source of joy and laughter.

God laughs when people talk about the future like they know it and can control it. God laughs when His worst and greatest enemies take up against Him.

Psalm 2:1-4 Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord. ...

4 He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.

Psalm 37:12-13 The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him,

13 but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming.

The presumptuous actions of kings and armies, or rulers and presidents and governors and experts are all laughable, as if they know the future and can control its outcome.

And why does God laugh? He laughs for our benefit, to let us know He has this in hand, to comfort us and give us confidence. This is no contest, the outcome is not in doubt.

When we laugh at the times to come, at the future, we are showing our faith and confidence that God will handle all of our greatest problems.

If you walk by a house with a big sign posted, “beware of dog” and you look behind the fence and you see a big dog but he’s on a really big strong chain and he is barking and growling and tugging and pulling but not going anywhere, are you afraid? He is restrained, controlled, limited.

So is Satan limited, so is Covid-19, so is all of history.

What was Jesus doing in the storm on the Sea of Galilee. He was sleeping. Why? He had no fear. Keep your eye on the captain of the ship. If the captain isn't sweating, no need for you to.

Is Jesus sleeping in your boat in the storm? Of course He is, He is right there with you and there is not an anxious bone in His body, so why are all your bones shaking?

We need to cultivate the ability to laugh at our fears, to grow in the grace of laughing at our future and even laughing at death. And not just a nervous little laugh, not just one of those glancing over the shoulder kinds of twitter. Not the laughter of doubt like Sarah.

The Gospel should make us give a hearty laugh, a belly laugh, a “Are you serious, is that all you got” kind of laugh? If God has done for us what He has in the Gospel, then what can this world do to us? Whatever is the very worst in your life can't touch the good news of the Gospel.

I Peter 1:3-9 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 ... you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Remember as a child you took security in the fact that your father could beat up all the other fathers. Your father was big and strong and could do anything and take care of anything.

Your Father is God, the one who made the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.

Your Messiah and Savior and deliverer of the world is Jesus.

The Spirit who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Your Father is God. Laugh like your Father.

Laugh because you know Him and who He is and you know His strength and His love.

Laugh because you are safe and secure in His sovereignty.

We are Reformed Christians, we believe God is in control. A fearful Christian is an oxymoron. Your Father is God. Laugh like your Father.

Implications and application.

What should we do?

Take inventory. Identify what you are afraid of. Name it, bring it out into the open. Be specific.

Ask yourself, what has a grip on you, what is causing stress, tension, anxiety, fear?

Then notice what it is doing to you and what you are doing with it.

Then ask why does this have such a hold on you, what is the worst that could happen?

Then go to the Father who is God and talk to Him about it. Name your fears and confess them as sin.

Ask Him to remind you of His specific promises that speak to your specific fear.

Ask Him to give you a fear of the Lord, the kind that leads to wisdom and life.

There are basically two fears: fear of God or fear of everything else.

Those who fear God don't have to fear anything else.

Those who don't fear God will fear everything else.

Fear God and nothing else.

Fear God and gain a heart of wisdom and knowledge.

Fear God and grow in trust and faith and hope and love.

Fear God and be anxious about nothing else, fear God and kill anxiety and worry.

Fear God and learn to laugh at the future.

Fear God and cast all your cares on Him.

Fear God and act in faith.

Fear binds us up and keeps us from living by faith.

Fear keeps us from living in freedom.

So turn on your fear, laugh at it and show it your freedom by acting contrary to it.

If fear has you gripping something tightly, then let it go, do something that is giving.

If fear of someone getting the better of you has you withholding forgiveness or grace, give it.

If fear of conflict has you bound and isolated, then pray and by faith, go and seek peace.

If you are bound by worry, go and do some small thing for someone else.

If you are afraid of this virus, do something for someone else who is more vulnerable to it.

How often in Scripture do we encounter people in their poverty giving to someone else, doing something for someone else?

Rather than focus on what you don't have or what you lack, or aren't able to do, focus on something you can do. Fight fear by opening up your heart and your hands.

Write this down, post it in a place where you will see it and be reminded to laugh at the future.

Proverbs 31:25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

Romans 8:31-39 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ...

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.