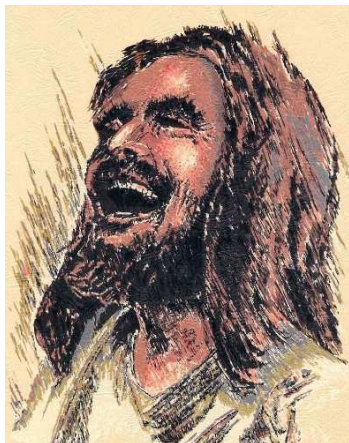


Getting to know our Faith and our Church:

"I am sure that Jesus had a sense of humour. He had to have in order to put up with all that he had to put up with, but there don't seem to be too many examples of his humour in the Bible. Can you identify any?"

Psalms 2 v4a certainly affirms that God is capable of laughter: "The One enthroned in heaven laughs". Certainly there are times when Jesus teaches using imagery that would provoke a sense of the ridiculous – such as the image of a camel getting through the eye of a needle. We need also to remember that humour is easily lost in translation – clever plays on words disappear such as that in Matthew 23.24b "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" where the Aramaic word for gnat is 'galma' and the word for camel is 'gamla'.

There are plenty of passages where Jesus' audience would have laughed at the phrases he used; When in Matthew 5.41 he says "if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile", the people would have known the right of a Roman soldier to compel any person from occupied lands to carry his pack for him, for one mile, and the counterpart that if any soldier impressed a person to carry it further that was viewed as excessive and could lead to punishment for the soldier. One can imagine an image of a soldier begging an individual to put his pack down and let him carry it himself lest he get into trouble.



Irony, wit, satire and wordplay are certainly present in the teachings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels: There are no jokes in the modern sense but the purpose of the Gospel writers was not to entertain but rather record the message of the Good News in Christ.

As we have been journeying through the season of Lent, with more emphasis on Jesus as "a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3) there has been little humour in the passages of scripture appointed to be read Sunday by Sunday.

Images such as that of the Laughing Christ have proven controversial in some places. The Bible does not record any moment that Jesus laughed but he did go to weddings, tell stories, play with children, tie his questioners in knots and have to deal with those who were surprised by God's love.

In Luke's Gospel Jesus teaches the crowd saying "Blessed *are* ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh" (Luke 6.21b) and the contrasting "Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep" (Luke 6.25b). Jesus challenges the complacent laughter of those who perpetuate injustice and suffering whilst affirming that those whose suffering is real and present will come to a time for laughter and rejoicing.

The passage in Ecclesiastes 3.4 records the words "A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;" – Though the Gospels don't explicitly record Jesus' laughing, I have no doubt that he did; they also don't record him dancing, and I similarly believe that he would have done – King David danced in front of the Ark of the Covenant, and a number of Coptic texts as well as the apocryphal 'Acts of John' record Jesus on the night before his arrest and crucifixion inviting the disciples to dance with him as he sang a hymn. I suspect that Jesus laughed, danced and was altogether more 'alive' than much Western tradition especially since Puritan influence at the Reformation has allowed him to be.