

Did Jesus ever crack a joke, and got his disciples rolling on the floor, laughing out loud? One of the essential factors of life that makes the human life endearing is laughter. The funnier the joke, the harder the people laugh.

People also laugh, when they are happy. Happiness and laughter go together proportionately. The happier you are, the more you laugh; the more you laugh, the happier you are. Conversely, if you are not so happy with your life, laughter is rarely heard.

I searched the Gospels, and I found that Jesus was a person with live emotions. He was not afraid of crying in public. John records tersely in 11:35:

Jesus wept.

So I searched to see if anyone captured Jesus laughing. Guess what: Jesus was never recorded to have laughed. Instead, the Gospels recorded that people laughed at him. When Jesus came to Jairus' house, and told the mourners that the girl was not

dead, but sleeping, they all laughed at him.

What is more disturbing than this was found in his teaching. Luke records in 6:25:

“Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. “Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.”

Whoa! What did Jesus have against those who were having a good time? But we should understand that it was not like Jesus hated the happy people with laughter. What was assumed in Jesus' teaching was that those who laughed caused others to mourn. Jesus spoke on behalf of those who were oppressed, and he encouraged and ministered to them. Those who amassed wealth and happiness on the backs of the poor, Jesus warned them with impending woe.

To those who are mourning, Jesus had this to say:

“Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. “Blessed

are you that weep now, for you shall laugh.

Anyway, since that is all that the Gospels talk about laughter, one begins to wonder, if Jesus was ever caught laughing at all. Was hanging around Jesus like being under the perpetual black thundercloud that was about to let loose the lightening bolts? Was Jesus always upset about the Pharisees and hypocrites that he was mostly brooding, and hardly ever finding time to laugh or crack a joke?

Once I said cheerfully to a church member, “Good morning! How are you doing today?” He shot back, “What’s good about it?” It really happened. Given the choice, people would not like to hang around a person who is boorish, mean, or full of complaints. People would rather hang around the one who is happy, funny, and energetic.

If the TV programs are any indication, there are crowds of people who flock to hear comedians tell jokes, and pay

good money for it. Most comedians I heard, however, often seemed to rely on crude, and even offensive, devices, but paying people flocked to hear them, nevertheless.

To me, it is the indication that people are hungry for laughter. Deep in the psyche, people are starving for laughter. They may have no trouble laughing at others, but they cannot laugh by themselves. That is so, because deep inside, many people are hurting. They are lonely. They are suffering. They are angry. They are disillusioned. They cannot laugh, because something is blocking their spirits. So they flock to the comedians who make them laugh.

Laughter is something you cannot force out of people. People just do not laugh, if it is not funny. So people like hanging around those who can make them laugh. They even regard that humorous personality a virtue. But we must make a distinction between two different kinds of laughter.

I borrow this story from Asimov: Moskowitz' young son, Sammy asked one day, "Hey, Pop, what do they mean when they say, 'business ethics'?" Moskowitz beamed, "Very good, my son. It is delightful to see you take an interest in such things. Let me tell you: Let's say that a woman comes into the store, buys a small item, and pays with a \$20 bill. You make the change, that comes out to be \$18.12, and you turn to take care of other customers. A few minutes later you become aware that she left the store, forgetting to pick up the change, which remains on the counter. Do you see the picture, my son?"
"I get it, Pop."
"Now comes the question of business ethics. Do I, or do I not, tell my partner?"

One is the laughter that comes out, when one hears or sees something funny. The other is a laughter that comes out, when one is happy.

Once you walked out of the theater rocking with laughter, the

reality hits you. You are still the same old you who aches inside. The comedian did not cure that pain.

So what was it like to hang around Jesus? Did he ever laugh or crack a joke? Maybe he did. Maybe he did not. But we know those people who stuck around him. They were not the gaggle of fawning women who followed him. They were not a bunch of dudes who liked laughing with him. Something about Jesus captivated them.

For others, however, something about Jesus repelled them. Jesus was a blasphemous rule-breaker. The Pharisees, scribes, and high priests, all hated him. And there were disciples who could not stomach his teaching. Many of his disciples left him, saying,

"This is a hard saying; who can listen to it? (Jn. 6:60)"

Now, Jesus pushed to the edge the remainder of his disciples. He asked them who they thought he was. When the disciples

replied, Jesus told them he must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, scribes, and be killed. What a bummer it must have been. The disciples were all excited about entering Jerusalem. Jesus just threw the wettest blanket over the fire.

When Peter told Jesus that he was the Messiah, Jesus quashed Peter. Further, Jesus told the disciples that, once he got to Jerusalem, that was the end of the trail for him: he would be killed. Who in the right mind would plan to die on the cross? Then Jesus called Peter Satan with the next breath, when Peter tried to change his mind. Would you say that this was a good way of winning the confidence of his disciples?

Yet despite all this, something about Jesus captivated the disciples, and they stuck with him all the way to Jerusalem. We have the advantage of the hindsight of what happened to the disciples in Jerusalem. The disciples did not know how they

would behave, when a threat challenged them. Would you know exactly what you would do, if a serious threat to your health and/or career presented itself in the course of your discipleship? We cannot say for sure that we would never do what the disciples did to Jesus.

The question is: what about Jesus' person that captured the imagination of those who followed him, despite the grim, negative, and depressing speech of doom on the way to Jerusalem?

Jesus may not have made people laugh, but Jesus did give people meanings to their lives. People may not want to give up their lives for anything, but they would willingly give up their lives for a meaningful cause. That is so, because people seek meaning in their lives, and even if it would cost their lives, people are willing to give up their lives to attain that meaningfulness.

Jesus de facto discouraged his disciples from following him.

The disciples really had to sit down and ponder about what they were getting themselves into. They decided to follow Jesus, because they believed in a cause worth dying for, a cause that was worth exchanging their lives for. At least that was what they believed then.

When people see the meaningfulness in the cause they believe in, they are willing to make a sacrifice, in order to attain that meaningfulness. Even if they lose their wealth or lives in the course of the effort, they believe that the cause is worth giving up their lives for. And that is exactly what Jesus meant by this:

³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

The disciples lived by the faith in Jesus. This faith was something that was costly. This faith in Jesus bears a costly consequence in life. If we truly believe that Jesus is our Lord,

our faith in Jesus should cost us something—something of serious consequence. Not something like giving up your chocolate for the Lent. Otherwise, the Christian religion would not matter much more than a fashion, a fad, or a religious way of dieting that comes and goes seasonally.

Jesus promises us life—an abundant life. And that life is so costly, that it was worth risking life itself to attain it. Life is the only thing that is worth risking life for it.

A man went up to a king and asked for a large piece of land. The king took him to the great plain, and promised to give it to him. But the man wanted more. He wanted the great mountain ranges and the rivers that flow through the plains. The king granted him his wish, and told him that the area of the land he can cover on his feet from the sunrise to sunset shall be all his. All he had to do was to return to the starting point. Next morning, the man was ready. As soon as

the sun peeked over the horizon, the man began to run. He was thirsty and tired, but he did not stop. Each time he stopped to drink water, he was driven forward again by the thought of losing that much piece of territory. So he pressed on. The sun was sinking at the horizon, when he arrived at the beginning point. The king was waiting for him. The man used his last ounce of strength to take the step onto the beginning point. Then he collapsed and breathed his last. The king said, “All you needed was 6 feet of land,” and had him buried right where he fell dead.

I heard this story when I was a little kid. I wish I could find out the source. I think Jesus was talking about the same thing here:

“For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed what can they give in return for their life?”

There are things in life that we commit ourselves, in order to attain it. Our faith in Jesus should cause us to stop and ask

this question: Is it really worth my life? What is worth risking my life, in order to attain it?

We may have the advantage of the hindsight, unlike those disciples. But we are not in any advantage, because, just as the disciples did not know how they would behave when challenged, we do not know how we will behave in the future, once the challenges to our faith threaten us.

Nevertheless, what counts now is the faith we presently keep. Faith allows us the discernment of what makes our lives meaningful. And at the same time, faith poses this question: What is worth risking your life, in order to attain it?

The disciples stuck with Jesus, because Jesus showed them the meaningfulness of life. He did show them that meaningful things of life bring happiness, no matter how small, or no matter how costly they may be.