



Minutes With Messiah

Volume 23, Issue 5

Web Site: <http://www.minuteswithmessiah.com>

March 2022

GEESE AND CRANES

On our drive to church, we pass a soccer field. Quite often, the field is covered with Canada Geese feeding. Going a different way to get home, we pass another field. In the winter this one is usually covered in straw and stubble. Instead of geese, here we often see flocks of cranes. We never see cranes on the soccer field, and never see geese on the fallow field. It always seems strange, but there is a simple explanation. Geese tend to prefer to eat grasses. Some people own geese to mow their lawns, rather than a mechanical lawnmower. It is cheaper and more eco-friendly. And geese make excellent burglar alarms. On the other hand, cranes prefer eating seeds and insects. Both are probably plentiful in the other field. They stay in their own ecosystem because that is the way God created them.

People, and even churches, tend to be geese and cranes. They stay where they can feed best. They stay with their kind. Sometimes, unfortunately, their “kind” is divided by race or ethnicity. Thus you hear of “historically black” colleges or churches. “Historically” means that it is changing, but not at a very fast pace. There may be other factors that cause us to stay with the familiar.

People tend to prefer their own economic status. Often we think of this working downward. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, Mr. Darcy is about ten times richer than the other rich society people of the novel. It was not the custom of the time to speak to him unless you had been introduced by a mutual acquaintance. Nevertheless, even the other characters in the book held to their own society and their own snobbish ways. Even the way you addressed a person (Miss Elizabeth Bennet as opposed to Lizzy, except to immediate family) was dictated by class consciousness. But it sometimes works the other way. Those of a lower economic class sometimes take pride in remaining in their neighborhood rather than trying to move somewhere else. Even if they achieve a certain degree of economic mobility, home is home.

Even in work settings, people tend to compartmentalize themselves. In company meetings, people tend to sit with others of their department. They may look down on (or up to) a person based on what floor they work in. If the company is large enough, they may not even know anyone in another department unless they regularly interact with them.

Such behavior is not limited to just people; churches may exhibit a certain degree of sameness. In Albuquerque, we have had city-wide assemblies twice a year. I have often thought that someone should make a rule that no more than one family from a congregation should sit in a particular row. This would force people to meet members of other congregations, which is the point of the assembly. But it doesn't even have to involve multiple congregations. In a congregation of about 250 people, my mother used to say, “Let's sit on the other side of the auditorium so we can see people we haven't talked to in years.” The purpose of the assembly is to “consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.” (Heb 10:24) That's hard to do if we don't associate with everyone.

Congregations also tend to have their own character, based on their membership and style of worship. Some churches of Christ have started using mechanical accompaniment to the singing, or allowing women to lead in the worship. Some prefer to sing the newer songs to the “old favorites.” These congregations tend to attract the younger or more “progressive” memberships. The *a capella* congregations and those that tend more to the classic hymns are usually made up of a totally different membership.

Is all of this wrong? Not at all! God created geese and he created cranes. “Birds of a feather flock together.” This may not be a matter of prejudice or even of laziness. Sometimes it is because we each have different diets. A home congregation may not be constitutionally able to digest a preacher sermon. A “traditional” congregation may not survive on a diet of group-speak. It is not because one is better than the other. It is because God created us according to our own kind.

CONTENTS

Geese and Cranes	1
Laughing At God	2
¿Y porque no?	4

All articles Copyright 2022 by Tim O'Hearn unless otherwise noted. The ideas expressed in these articles are those of the authors and are not to be considered the doctrine of any specific congregation or eldership.

LAUGHING AT GOD

It has been said that the thing that distinguishes man from the animals is an ability to laugh, and especially to laugh at himself. Some animals like the hyena and some birds make sounds that sound like laughter, but they aren't emotional responses; they are just sounds. Laughter may be a response to something unexpected. Most humor involves an unanticipated punch line. Many people laugh as a nervous response to someone else's misfortune—a fall, dropping something, even an injury. Uncontrollable laughter may be a response to personal trauma. Or it may be a response to something that tickles (which for someone who is extremely ticklish may be considered a personal trauma). The Bible talks a lot about laughter. There are some people in the Bible whose laughter was inappropriate. They laughed at God.

Abraham and Sarah

When one thinks of someone who laughed at God in the scriptures, most likely they would be thinking of

It is not nice to laugh at God. Who can say what he will do to you if you laugh?

Sarah, the wife of Abraham. It is true that she laughed at God, and denied it, but her husband laughed first.

And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? (Gen 17:16-17)

It is not nice to laugh at God. Who can say what he will do to you if you laugh. In Abraham's case, he gave him a reminder for the rest of his life that he dared laugh at God. "And thou shalt call his name Isaac." (Gen 17:19) For the next seventy-five years (Gen 25:7), Abraham had to call his son by a name that means "he laughed." A reminder for two or three years would be bad enough, but seventy-five! And the son had to live with that name for a hundred eighty years. (Gen 35:28) One hundred five of those were after his laughing father died. When God punishes, it is not always for a short time. Some people

think Isaac was so named because his mother laughed, but that was not the case.

His mother did laugh at God, however, and for the same reason. God surprised her.

And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? (Gen 18:10-12)

It is bad enough to laugh at God. While he is capable of humor, this certainly was not such a time. Sarah compounded her error by lying to God.

And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh. (Gen 18:13-15)

The scriptures do not record whether Sarah received any punishment for denying her laughter. Maybe it was enough to have the Creator of the Universe to call her out for laughing. Maybe God figured that the same punishment he gave to Abraham was appropriate for his wife, even if she was not to live as long. Nevertheless, she did laugh. And we remember her for it.

Others in the Old Testament

Abraham and Sarah could almost be forgiven for laughing at God. Most people in their time of life would probably react the same way. Some others laughed at God or his messengers with much less reason.

Hezekiah had restored the Temple worship when he became king. Accordingly, he decided to celebrate Passover. It had been a long time since anybody had done so, even though it was mandated by the Law. So, he sent messengers to call people to return to the Law and celebrate the holiday.

So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem. (2 Chron 30:10-11)

It is bad enough to laugh at messengers of a king. It is pretty bad to scorn messengers of God. But to do so in relation to keeping the law of God is nearly unforgivable. The writer of 2 Chronicles (possibly Ezra) doesn't say what happened to those who laughed at God. He chooses, rather, to emphasize the people who chose to obey, especially those of Judah. They were so happy in keeping Passover, they chose to extend it another seven days.

Nehemiah had heard in Persia that the walls of Jerusalem were in disrepair. This was long after the Babylonians had burned the city. He got permission from the king to rebuild the walls. He convinced the people who had returned to Jerusalem to do the work. Then he met some opposition.

But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? (Neh 2:19)

God had blessed the building of the wall. Instead of rejoicing, Tobiah the Ammonite said, "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall." (Neh 4:3) They laughed at God. They mocked what was being done in his name. They even went so far as to plot to kill Nehemiah. Where are Horon and Ammon today? Jerusalem is still standing, although those particular walls were later destroyed.

Friends of Jairus

Jairus was a ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum. He probably knew what the other leading people of the Jews in Jerusalem were saying about Jesus. That didn't matter. His twelve-year-old daughter was dying. Jesus had just returned from healing a man possessed of demons on the other side of the sea of Galilee. Surely he could help Jairus' daughter. So he sent for Jesus.

Jesus chose to come, but while he was still on his way he was told that the girl had died. That didn't stop Jesus. He continued on to the house where the girl was still lying.

And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. (Lk 8:52-53)

They knew who Jesus was. They had probably seen some of his healings. They likely had heard about turning water to wine in a town about eighteen miles away. They almost certainly had heard about what had happened shortly before in the town of Nain, twenty-five miles away; Jesus had raised a boy from the dead. In spite of all this, they laughed at him. Whether they knew he was the son of God is irrelevant. They were laughing at God. But God has a way of getting the last laugh.

And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came

again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat. (Lk 8:54-55)

Even though Jesus told the parents to tell nobody what had been done, the word got around. After all, the girl that everyone knew was dead just walked down the stairs and into the kitchen. How could they not know? They had laughed at God. Now God could laugh at them.

Those in the scriptures who laughed at God had reactions ranging from disbelief to outright hatred. You have to believe that we haven't changed much in the past few thousand years.

Some today laugh at God and his scriptures, and say it is all myth. After all, nobody can raise the dead or immediately cause a blind man to see just by touching

They laughed at God.
They mocked what was
being done in his name.
Where are their countries
now?

him. And that story about creating the world in seven days; didn't Darwin disprove that? Anyone who hears the word of God and refuses to believe it is true is laughing derisively at God. Yes, it requires a certain amount of faith to accept the Bible at face value. It takes a certain amount of faith to accept many things the scientists or skeptics would like us to believe, too. One difference, however, is that one can believe the truth of God's word and still believe in science. It is not an either-or proposition. Those who reject the Bible outright make it either-or. They want the two to be mutually exclusive. Unfortunately for them, God will have the last laugh.

Others, many more, laugh at God in disbelief. They don't reject God as a concept. They may even accept the Bible as the inerrant word of God. They just don't hear what Jesus told Jairus. "Fear not: believe only." (Lk 8:50) Doubt is a still voice that robs you of confidence. It makes you wonder if God can really do what you ask of him. Even if you believe that every miracle recorded in scripture is absolutely true, do you wonder if God can do the small things? Is God only in it for the flashy stuff? When we let doubt in, we laugh at God in the same way that Abraham and Sarah did; in the same way the mourners at the house of Jairus did.

It's not nice to laugh at God. It can have serious consequences. Fortunately, God understands. Sometimes we laugh out of our nervousness. God can forgive, and make us laugh with Him instead.

¿Y PORQUE NO?

“A bailar y amar la vida!
A bailar. ¿Y porque no?
La Pelona bailará también.
No le importará con quién.”

Frida, Migdalia Cruz

“To dance and love life!
To dance—and why not?
Death dances too,
It is not important with whom.”

In the finale of the opera *Frida*, with music by Robert Xavier Rodriguez, the chorus is celebrating as Frida Kahlo is dying. In the Spanish version, the cast sings the lines above.

Celebrating death is an important part of many cultures. In Mexico, the Day of the Dead allows families to spend the day with the memories of their dear departed. Many people are familiar with the New Orleans jazz funeral, where the band plays solemn hymns on the way to the cemetery, but upbeat jazz in the parade back. Even an occasional Christian group will hold a celebration of life rather than a funeral.

King David followed such a pattern. The child conceived in his adultery with Bathsheba was dying. David spent the days fasting and praying. The servants feared to tell him the child had died, fearing he would fall into an even greater depression. When David realized, however, that the child was dead, he

arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to

his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. (2 Sam 12:20)

When they asked him why he did this, he had a simple answer. “Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.” (2 Sam 12:23)

The lines from the opera *Frida* are also appropriate. Death doesn’t care who she dances with. Eventually she will dance with everyone. Some might say that is not a reason to celebrate. If you don’t believe in an afterlife, or if you are not assured of an afterlife in heaven, it is not a reason for feasting. You end this life, and after comes nothing good. Those who trust in Jesus, however, are certain of two things: there will be a resurrection, and there will be a pleasant afterlife. If we weren’t assured of these things, then Paul said, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” (1 Cor 15:19) We would be mourning now, and there would be no celebration later. After all, Death, she cares not with whom she dances.

The rest of the sentiment expressed is also quite scriptural. Those who follow God should be ready and willing to celebrate in this life. A bailar. ¿Y porque no? And why not? In Ecclesiastes, the preacher (probably Solomon) repeats that “all is vanity.” That is not, however, the ultimate message of the book. Instead, he also says, “a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry.” (Eccl 8:15, with variations in 3:13 and 5:18) Eat and drink, and why not dance and love life! This is the only one you have on this earth, so why not enjoy it? God has given us much to enjoy. Surely it is our responsibility to do so. To dance and love life. And why not?

Timothy J. O’Hearn
737 Monell Dr NE
Albuquerque NM 87123