

Gray Weekly News



Week Leading to Sunday, March 27, 2022



BASKETBALL FOR ALL

Sunday, March 27 - 5 pm

Food, fun and fellowship

Volunteers are needed to provide food, set up, clean up and cheer on the basketball players.

Laugh and Grow Strong

By Ginger Gaines-Cirelli, www.ministrymatters.org

There is a sculpture that has inspired and encouraged me for years. It has been in my pastor's study—often on my desk—since I received it as a gift from my mother. It has become a profound symbol for me of something deeply important in the spiritual life. The sculpture is of a laughing pig. The pig is on its back, its two front hooves holding its round belly, mouth wide open in laughter. For me it's a sacred icon of earthy joy. I find it impossible to look at the giggling swine without feeling a shift in my spirit—a lightening up.

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Fourth Sunday in Lent



Joshua 5:9-12

Psalm 32

2nd Corinthians 5:16-21

Luke 15:1-3; 11b-32

The Extravagant Grace of God

News and Notes

THIS WEEK

Sunday, March 27

Please join us on Sundays at 11 am. If you are unable to come in person, you can watch our livestream at graymemorialumc.org/facebook.com or graymemorialumc.org/youtube, at 11 am or any time after that at graymemorialumc.org/



If you have prayer requests, please contact Norma Adams, Jennifer Skinner or Gail Teems.

You may also call the church office at 850/385-6441 or send a text to 850/933-8469.

Prayer Requests

Sam, Patsy and Betty

George, John and Patty

Brenna, Bella, Joyce and Bob

Friends in need of strength and peace of mind

All those who are suffering from accidents, illnesses and surgery

Household Items Needed

Collecting items for young single mother, 3 year old daughter and 14 year old son. They are trying to make a fresh start after suffering through domestic violence. Their **immediate needs are queen and twin size sheets, comforters/spreads; used laptop and/or television; and cleaning supplies.**

We will be collecting cash donations and gift cards for them as well. Please bring your donations to the church. Contact Anita at 850/933-8469 or leave a message at the office 850/385-6441 if you need help with furniture and other heavy items. Thank you to everyone who is willing to help!

Study of "Jesus and the Disinherited"

Howard Thurman's book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*. This six-week study will be theologically exciting, spiritually stimulating, and communally transforming, as we engage the work of one who greatly influenced the life and ideology of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Do you love Jesus, thought-provoking conversation, and personal growth and development? If so, this study is for you! Join Nick Quinton, Latricia Edwards Scriven, and Michelle Shrader on Mondays at 6pm for six weeks, **beginning Monday, May 2, 2022**, via Zoom. Registration information will be sent out in a few weeks.

Laughter doesn't often get its due in Christian settings. In an attempt to be faithful, we can become awfully intense, we can take ourselves very seriously, and we can begin to feel responsible for every single problem and broken place in the world. That's a heavy load to carry. It's important to remember that we get to share in the work of new creation that God is always busy with, but we are not God! Lightening up doesn't mean we aren't taking our responsibilities seriously, but rather it means that we have proper perspective. That's good news if I've ever heard it; and I need to be reminded of this good news all the time. I need constant reminders to lighten up!

I have a running debate with a close friend about Jesus on this point. My friend tends to think that Jesus was too concerned with the great cosmic struggle between good and evil and the deeply bruising earthly struggle against greed and injustice to spend much time joking around or laughing. I, however, am convinced that all those children wouldn't want to be near Jesus if he didn't laugh and play. Everyone wanted Jesus to join their dinner parties; and he spent time with folks who knew how to have a good time. And, though in translation it's sometimes hard to recognize, some of Jesus's parables are deeply funny. All this is to say, I think Jesus laughed. A lot. And the more I learn about laughter, the more convinced I am of that.

Laughter is scientifically proven to have healing effects on our physical and mental health. It boosts our immune system, relieves muscle tension and stress, and causes the brain to release "endorphins, interferon-gamma (IFN), and serotonin. These are nature's own feel good chemicals and are responsible for helping to keep your mood uplifted." Studies out of Harvard Medical School and the Mayo Clinic (among others) confirm that "nothing works faster or more dependably to bring your mind and body back into balance than a good laugh." In other words, laughter is good medicine when you're stressed, ill, or discouraged.

I imagine all of us can think of a time when we were in the midst of a deep struggle or right in the middle of grief and found ourselves laughing with others; and in those moments we felt at least a moment of relief. There is deep folk wisdom in the phrase "sometimes you've got to laugh to keep from crying!"

In one study I consulted, I read that "laughter allows us to entertain the absurd and imagine alternate possibilities." Laughter can bring relief to physical tension and stress, over-responsibility, disappointment, grief, taking ourselves too seriously, and lack of perspective. Christian writer and essayist Anne Lamott speaks to some of this saying:

Humor and laughter and silliness and giggles can get into some dark, walled-off places inside us and bring breath and lightness. . . . When I am at my most stressed, I sometimes lose my sense of humor, and that condition is just a nightmare....For me, hell is when I'm absolutely stuck in self-obsession, this terrible, terrible self-consciousness. The healing and grace often comes from being put back together by people . . . [who] somehow help me lighten up and get my sense of humor back. When I have my sense of humor back, nothing can stop me.

Lamott describes humor and laughter as “carbonated holiness.” I love that way of thinking about the gift of laughter, as a bubbly, refreshing drink of God’s grace, as the thing that is always available to us, just waiting to nourish and renew us body and soul: “A good laugh is a release—even if only for a moment—from worry, strife, and self. It is a sudden, often unbidden confession that somehow, all is well, or at least there is a hope that it can be.” I can’t remember who wrote it, but someone once said that Christians should look more redeemed. That is, the good news of God’s ever-present love, mercy, and resurrection power should lead us to rejoice, to laugh and be glad! So, what are some ways that we can cultivate laughter in our lives? Here is a pretty good guide I found.

Smile. Smiling is contagious! Practice smiling at anything and everything that is pleasant or kind. Try offering people a smile on the street instead of keeping your head down over your phone. Smile at the folks who serve you in a restaurant or at a service counter. Smile at your coworkers and family members. See what a difference all this smiling makes!

Count your blessings. Write them down. When you intentionally take stock of the positive things in your life, you guard against those depressing or upsetting thoughts that can get in the way of humor and laughter.

Spend time with fun, playful people. People who know how to laugh and be silly, who can see humor in the absurdities of life, and who have a playful disposition are good influences. Find them and let them influence you!

The practice is to intentionally seek out laughter in your life so that it becomes part of your regular spiritual diet, nourishing you for the long haul attending to the serious work of sacred resistance. Drink in the “carbonated holiness” that can refresh and renew!

St. Ignatius, founder of the Jesuit order, once remarked to a novice, “I see you are always laughing, and I am glad of it.” Ignatius also “once danced a jig to cheer up downcast Jesuits. He was a man whose joy was known to be full.” So much so that the phrase “Laugh and grow strong” is often attributed to him. Laugh and grow strong! Imbibe some carbonated holiness. Find your laughing pig and keep it ever before you!

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday, March 22	7 pm	Board of Trustees Meets in person
Wednesday March 23	7 pm	Lenten Bible Study with Pastor Beth Via Zoom
Thursday, March 24	10 am 5:30 pm	Bible Study Choir Practice
Sunday, March 27	9:30 am 11 am	Lenten Bible Study with Pastor Beth Worship Service – UMCOR Sunday
Monday, March 28	5:30 pm	Community Yoga
Wednesday, March 30	7 pm	Lenten Bible Study with Pastor Beth Via Zoom
Thursday, March 31	10 am 5:30 pm	Bible Study Choir Practice
Saturday, April 2	8 – 12	Church Workday
Sunday, April 3	9:30 am 11 am	Lenten Bible Study with Pastor Beth Worship Service – UMCOR Sunday