

25th April 2023

Laughter

“Mirth is God’s medicine. Everybody ought to bathe in it.”

Henry Ward Beecher, *Royal Truths* (1869)

I love to hear people laughing, and I get a great kick out of being the person who has made them laugh.

A Scottish comedian was recounting his journey into stand-up comedy. “I was a wimp at school,” he said, “and I was never going to be destined for an academic career. But I can remember (I must have been about eight) saying something in class that made people laugh. I didn’t become the class clown – the teacher was too strict to allow that – but I knew what it felt like to create laughter, to do something that made other people – and me – feel good. Once you know you can do it, you need it more and more. It developed from there. I can make people laugh. It’s what makes me really be me.”

I was a wimp at school too. I don’t remember making people laugh in class – teachers were strict for me too – and I carried my shyness into my university days. Two things made a difference: firstly, I joined the University Shinty Club, and ended up in an all-conquering team. I was with lads from “back home”, and it felt good to be welcomed.

Secondly, I became part of a Youth Fellowship in a city church. Again, it was unconditional welcome. But there’s one incident that stands out. We were on our annual visit to the minister’s manse. He was showing slides of a trip to Paris, and up on the screen appeared a picture of the *Arc de Triomphe*. “Underneath is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier from World War I,” the minister intoned, “and there’s an eternal flame which burns in memory of the dead – but I’m sorry you can’t see the eternal flame in the photograph.” To which I said – louder than the *sotto voce* I’d intended – “Oh! It’s probably gone out!” It wasn’t the best bit of repartee, and was, of course, extremely cheeky. But everyone laughed – including the minister, thankfully. And, boy, did that make me feel good.

That’s probably why I’ve remembered that relatively trivial incident from fifty-five years ago. I could make people laugh. And like the Scottish comedian, it remains a big part of what makes me really be me!

A prayer for today

Someone once said that laughter puts a smile on God’s face. Who? It was probably me ...