

Knox Uniting Church Cluster

Sunday June 7th 2026 – Boronia Road Uniting Church (Year A. Pentecost 2)

Sermon (reflection) – by Russell Croxford

Bible passages: Psalm 33:1-12 and Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26 (NRSVUE)

“Who has the last laugh?”

There’s an old proverb that says, “He who laughs last, laughs loudest”. It means, of course that the person who triumphs in the end has the last and loudest laugh, having been laughed at or mocked by others initially.

History is filled with real-life examples of this. Think of the Wright brothers, Wilbur and Orville who built the first successful powered aeroplane in 1903. The first flight only lasted 12 seconds but it was the birth of aviation. At the time people laughed at them, mocked and derided them, saying things like, “If man was meant to fly, God would have given him wings”. But in the end, the Wright brothers had the last laugh. By 1908 the world held them in awe for their amazing achievements.

Countless successful people had at first been laughed at. Galileo was laughed at for saying the sun was the centre of the solar system, not the earth. Marie Curie was laughed when she discovered Radium, which was used in early cancer treatments. Nicola Tesla was laughed at for predicting technology that led to mobile phones and the internet. Their ideas were seen to be ridiculous, until they weren’t. Like the villain in a classic movie who laughs with a sinister laugh at the hero, when the hero appears to be losing, but in the end the hero always has the last laugh.

This happens all the way through the bible as well. The bible heroes were often mocked or laughed at. Goliath mocked young David, but David had the last laugh. Nehemiah was mocked when trying to rebuild the shattered walls of Jerusalem, but he had the last laugh. We are not sure if Abram was laughed at for leaving everything behind and going to a strange land, but it must have seemed like a crazy thing to do! But he did find the promised land. Maybe people laughed at Sarah when she told them she was expecting a child at 90 years old! Actually, Sarah herself even laughed at such a crazy idea (Gen 18:12). God’s ideas are so often laughed at!

So we come to Jesus himself. He also was certainly laughed at.

In today’s gospel reading from Matthew 9, Jesus goes to the home of Jairus (in Matthew he is just ‘a ruler’) where his daughter had just died. When Jesus said, “The girl is not dead, but asleep”, it says that the crowd ‘laughed at him’ (v24). That one line, “laughed at him”, is a very telling statement. It’s the key to understanding what’s really going on here.

When it says, ‘they laughed at him’, this not a happy, joyous laugh, like when you hear a good joke. The original word for laugh in this passage was a term meaning to laugh with disdain and derision. It was a mocking, scornful laugh, laced with ridicule. And we can understand this can’t we? For we know that laughing is so often closely associated with ridicule. Jesus was mocked and ridiculed for claiming he could bring a dead person back to life.

There is a wider context in this passage to take into account. It’s not just the raising of the dead girl that is laughed at and ridiculed. Earlier in the passage, Jesus calls Matthew to be a disciple. Matthew was a tax collector. Tax collectors were hated. They took money for the Romans. They cheated. They were greedy. What was Jesus thinking! Not only that, but Jesus goes to eat at Matthew’s home. How dare he do that with a ‘sinner’. The religious authorities simply could not cope with the radical way that Jesus did things, so they mocked him. They had their proper rules to obey. They had their systems and structures of religion to rigidly adhere to, and those systems didn’t allow for the things Jesus did.

That’s why Jesus said to the Pharisees, “I desire mercy not sacrifice” (quoting Hosea 6:6) (v 12). ‘Sacrifice’ here refers to what the Pharisees did by way of their rules, supposedly based on the laws of Moses, but Jesus told them there was something far more important than their rules – *mercy*. And by mercy it means grace, kindness, compassion, love, generosity, forgiveness, justice – all the ways he treated Matthew, a guy who had been rejected by everyone else.

Of course, there is an even wider context to this passage, which extends to the whole of Jesus' ministry. This is not the only time he is mocked. Perhaps the most severe example of mocking took place during his trial and death. It seemed like everyone was mocking him in that last week. The way the soldiers teased him was one example (Matt 27:27-31). Even when dying on the cross, passers-by mocked him. (Matt 27:35-44). They scoffed, jeered and laughed.

But Jesus had the last laugh, so to speak, because in the end his way of suffering was vindicated by God. Not that he ever went back to 'laugh' at everyone who had ever mocked him. As the resurrected Jesus, he never went back to Caiaphas, or Pilate, or the soldiers and said, "Look at me now, I'm alive, who's laughing now!". No, that was never his way. He simply came back to his followers, knowing that their personal testimonies of encounters with him would be the birth of the church and the spread of the gospel. No further proof was needed.

Nor did he go back later to the people in the crowd at the raising of the ruler's daughter and say, "You see! She's alive. I was right. So there, take that!" That wasn't his way. The testimony of the healing was where the real power lay, as it always was with Jesus.

As I mentioned before, there are examples all through the bible, of God's ways being mocked.

In today's reading from Psalm 33, it begins by praising God and going through all these wonderful and amazing qualities of God (v1-9). But then it makes an interesting declaration. It says, in verse 10, "The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples". In other words, the counsel (or wisdom/plans) of the 'nations' means nothing to God, in fact the 'nations' are frustrated by God's ways.

If we were to unpack that word, 'nations', we would find ourselves using words like, powers, empires, kingdoms, forces of control, even religious institutions, and so on. God's message always challenged such power-structures, and this was primarily Jesus' message too. Empire (and all that this word means) was and still is today in complete discord with Jesus' message.

As the Psalm goes on, "*The counsel of the Lord [as distinct from the counsel of the nations] stands forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations. Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord*". (v11-12). You can see what the Psalm is declaring – that the true way, even though mocked and ridiculed, stands forever and is where true happiness is found.

So, what does all this mean for us here today? Maybe you have, at some stage, been laughed at or ridiculed or teased because of your ideas. Maybe this has happened as a result of your choice to be a follower of Jesus, which, let's be honest, is often the more difficult pathway to take, and is often misunderstood by those who don't follow that pathway.

The challenge I believe is a *faith* challenge. To have faith that the things we do in the name of our Lord are the things that are right in the end, even if people think they are silly.

I'd invite you now to reflect for a moment on where you see yourself in connection with this idea of 'having the last laugh'

Here are some questions to think about:

When it comes to 'rules to live by', what 'systems and structures' do you live by and do you perhaps need to re-think this in any way?

Where do you think your own wisdom and way of life is truly aligning with God? Or *not* aligning with God?

Where do you feel you might need to be more 'foolish for God' – at the risk of being laughed at?

That last one is the most challenging, I think. How can we be 'foolish for God'? Every so often we might 'act the fool' and get a laugh from others, but that's not the foolishness we're talking about here. We are talking about being a fool for God. And that's risky. We might even get laughed at in a bad way. But let's be reassured that being a fool for God is also incredibly fulfilling and rewarding, because we know, in the end that it's the right thing to do. In the end we have the last laugh.

