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ESSAY

# Laughed So Hard I Cried

By Scott Hoezee | April 21, 2020 | 6 Comments

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# Laughed So Hard I Cried

We have all noted at some point the similarities between laughing and crying. Despite representing opposites poles on the emotional spectrum, the manifestation of each has similar results. Faces contort involuntarily, eyes narrow, noises emerge from us that are not quite in our control (and we can even become a little self-conscious over a heaving sob we cannot stop or a little-girl-like giggle we likewise cannot stop—if you have ever seen [CNN's Anderson Cooper giggle](#), you get it). Our mouths widen, our eyes spill over with tears, and we are for a time quite literally convulsed.

Sometimes the one can even give way to the other as we turn on an emotional dime to go from crying in our grief over a loved one's death and then sliding right into a good laugh when at the post-funeral lunch someone tells that perennially hilarious story about that time when Dad . . . Women who just gave birth toggle back and forth pretty well between the tears resulting from their intense physical pain to joyful mirth at having the little one laid on their chests and then right back to a form of crying but this time in tears of joy. We call ourselves “a hot mess” sometimes, and that pretty well nails it.

I don't know if I have ever read any musings on how or whether our dual ability to cry and to laugh tie in with our having been made in

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the Image of God. But since Jesus was the Image of God par excellence and since he seemed really good at hearty laughter and wrenching crying, there may be something God-like about our ability to do both. No other creatures we know of are able to shed emotional tears (and according to Bill Bryson's new book *The Body*, no one in medicine or science is quite sure why we humans shed emotional tears either). And although hyenas or sea lions or seagulls can sure sound sometimes like they are laughing their heads off (there is even a gull species called the Laughing Gull), they aren't. Their sounds just remind us of ourselves when we are whooping it up. And all of us who have experience with babies are amazed at how hard even a very young baby can laugh! Sure we mostly associate crying with babies but once those tykes start to giggle, it lights up whole rooms.

To laugh. To cry. To be able to mix them up. To be able to find humor even in tough moments. Maybe this is all tied to the Image of God. Whatever the theology behind it, most of us know that having a good laugh even in this COVID-19 time helps somehow just a bit. No, none of it subtracts from the untold pain of this moment and time. None of it mitigates the enormous losses people worldwide are suffering, both in terms of lost loved ones and lost jobs, lost revenue, lost dreams. And none of it should distract us from the horrors of the moment: the sharp uptick in domestic violence, the prospect of widespread depression and even suicide, the prospect of vigilante-like violence borne of fear and ignorance.

And yet, something in the human spirit manages to look for moments of brightness and lightness, of humor and a good hearty guffaw even in the midst of our fears. Maybe a chuckle now and then even helps us move forward, keeps our fears a bit more at bay, points us to the idea that we really were created for something better than a sin-soaked world of disease and death.

In any event, there are lots of people out there who can still make us laugh. Facebook can be—and is certainly right now in some corners of it—such a toxic place. One is forever on the cusp of pulling the plug. But for now I'd keep Facebook just for the memes and the links to some pretty inventive humorous videos that are trying to help folks get through these darker days with a few shafts of humorous light.

Actor and director John Krasinski has started his weekly YouTube program [“SGN”](#) or [“Some Good News”](#) that is itself a whimsical combination of heartwarming stories that will make you cry and humor that will make you laugh pretty hard at times, particularly home videos showing the clever ways people are coping with quarantines. There have been so many clever memes that play off our now common experiences in trying to make Zoom meetings work. One that made the rounds during Holy Week showed DaVinci's Last Supper painting with Jesus sitting alone at a table and the disciples all up on the top of the screen in Zoom boxes.

[A video my wife showed](#) me the other day hilariously depicts the limitations—if not outright drawbacks—of video- and audio-conferencing such as we are all forced to do pretty often these days.

And one of the [funniest viral videos](#) comes from a BBC sports commentator who has no sports to call and so instead covers with great flair the goings-on of his dogs.

And the list goes on—videos of customers paying for their groceries with sheets of toilet paper (and clerks only too glad to receive such payment), point-counterpoint Op-Ed columns one written by a dog urging that quarantines continue and one written by a cat urging their owners to please go back to work. And you have your own list.

Maybe we are laughing through our tears at times. Maybe we are laughing so that our tears cannot have the last word on every moment of every day. Maybe we are laughing because somehow, some way it was joy for which we were made. That at least might explain a blessing once spoken by no less than Jesus himself when he said, “Blessed are you who mourn now, for you will laugh.”

Let it be.

## Scott Hoezee

Scott Hoezee is Director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary.

## 6 Comments

/svm

April 21, 2020 at 7:53 am

Amen!

 Reply

**Jim Schaap**

April 21, 2020 at 8:43 am

Pure blessing. Thanks!

 Reply

**Gordon**

April 21, 2020 at 9:57 am

Thanks Scott for the morning humor.

 Reply

**Pam Adams**

April 21, 2020 at 10:19 am

Thank you for combining laughter and tears. I know they go together very well. I often cry for my now dead husband who lived the life God gave him with such vigor for the Lord with funny things he said and did. He did it all for the Lord so laughter and tears are naturals.

 Reply

**Deb V**

April 21, 2020 at 1:34 pm

Well done! I had a whole half hour not thinking about anything too serious!

 Reply

**Diana Walker**

April 21, 2020 at 2:32 pm

You get an A+ on this one.

Thank You!

 Reply

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