


Welcoming another through laughter

Going beyond formal greetings

Pratik Bagh

The smile is the door to laughter. However, this door of ours never opens to some. We choose to keep it closed. If you cannot smile seeing the other person, you would never think of engaging with that person in laughter.



Laughter deepens the friendship. When we fail to smile at new people, we miss the opportunity to welcome and get close to them. And in such a case, laughter cannot take place.

Laughter deepens the friendship. When we fail to smile at new people, we miss the opportunity to welcome and get close to them. And in such a case, laughter cannot take place.

My focus here is not on the laughter that intends to mock someone but on the one that works as the Greek pronoun. Both *he* and *ho* in Greek are relative pronouns, which introduce a dependent clause and connect it to the independent clause. So, even though

laughter is not something that we plan, it indeed connects people whenever it happens. I would call it a burst of healthy and unplanned laughter (*he, he, ho, ho*).

Connecting through laughter


My wife and I came to the United States from India. As we arrived on a weekend, the first thing we longed for was a church. We had recommendations to attend a specific Mennonite church, but that was not the only reason we chose to continue there. In our very first visit, we felt not only welcomed but also free to laugh. What made us feel free was the lovely smiles on people's faces. They not only greeted us with a smile, but they also went further and laughed with us, as if we are no different than them. Despite the cultural, linguistic, and contextual differences, we could enjoy

the conversation, as it was not a formal interview but an enjoyable time filled with laughter.

One thing that is going to remain with my wife and me forever from that church is their litany: “God of peace, Christ of peace, Spirit of peace, you are calling us to be peacemakers; today we light this candle as a reminder of our calling.” When we Anabaptists say that we are peacemakers, we also mean that we long to create an atmosphere in communities where laughter can occur; for only where there is peace (in relationships, lives, and communities) is laughter possible. Laughing can be used as an effective medicine for racism, hostility, and depression. Choosing to put the Christ-given joy on our faces as a smile can make us free.

The welcoming smile of Jesus

I imagine that Jesus had a smiling and welcoming face. I cannot imagine a person who is so kind, loving, wise, and caring *not* having a smile on his face. I recall the incident in the Gospels where children come to Jesus, and the disciples try to prevent them. A child never longs to go to a cheerless stranger. And it was not just one child but children that Jesus allowed to come to him (Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17). Such was the attitude, nature, and personality of Jesus that even children longed to connect with him.



The world today is promoting leaders who are tough and crude in words and person. But the Bible calls us to be Christ-like leaders who have time for children, tax collectors, persons with physical ailments, and those considered sinners.

The world today is promoting leaders who are tough and crude in words and person. But the Bible calls us to be Christ-like leaders who have time for children, tax collectors, persons with

physical ailments, and those considered sinners. Jesus was highly knowledgeable, mature, and most busy, but he had time to smile and spend time with these people considered unimportant by society and made them feel welcomed and loved.

Expressing welcome through laughter

How often do we let our need to be mature take away the opportunities for us to rest and enjoy the beauty of laughing and creating friendship? Some differentiate between joy and happiness, saying that joy need not

involve laughing, but I argue that the most excellent means of expressing joy is through laughter and a smile. It shows love, care, concern, and acceptance of another person. In our world filled with racism and fear of the other, laughter and a smiling face can make a difference, allowing us to connect beyond our differences.

Even a tiny smile can work as door, as I have experienced as a person of color. Let us keep some smiles on our faces to show that we are glad the other person is around. And let us be open to laughing. Because when you laugh with a person who is different than you, you are indirectly allowing that person to touch your heart. Shared laughter can bring people close beyond our differences.

About the author

Pratik Bagh is an MDiv student at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. He is also a volunteer pastor at the Asian Indian church in Pittsburgh, where he lives with his wife, Shabnam, and daughter, Shanice. He comes to the United States from India, where he belongs to the Bhartiya General Conference Mennonite Church (BGCMC).