

## IF YOU WANT TO GIVE GOD A LAUGH, TELL HER YOUR PLANS

Maybe you've heard these words before.....?

*"If you want to give God a laugh, tell him your plans" .....*

or, these days it's sometimes tweaked to:

*"If you want to give God a laugh, tell **her** your plans".*

Like so many expressions, its origins are uncertain.

Some say it's an ancient old Yidish expression, some attribute it to Woody Allen (also Jewish).

And, of course, like many expressions, there are different meanings we can give to the words.

The expression might be one of general negativity and pessimism – *things will always go wrong....*

Or maybe it's used to suggest a negative view of God – *he (or she) is just waiting to spoil our hopes.*

But maybe it's just a realistic acknowledgement that in our world, we live with uncertainty, and sometimes our plans don't work out in the way we expect.

Some years ago, before I came to Langside, the traditional church building that stood in Ledard Road was badly flooded, and the decision was taken to replace it.

In the end, a more modern building was built in its place, but it was a huge drama and upheaval and took a lot of work. Everyone who was part of Langside at that time remembers things like standing in the mud with wellies, endless meetings, the numerous fundraising efforts, the feeling of being homeless and uncertain about the future.

But despite the worries of that time, faith and fellowship increased, and finally, there was a brand new building.

Fast forward a few more years and the Church of Scotland was setting up a national initiative to allow individual congregations to (in their words) *"tell their story."*

Now, I thought that *"what is your story?"* was quite a good question to consider for any church. I remember asking the question to some of the elders, and the general reply was – *"Our story is that we had to build a new church building."*

That was true enough, but I wondered if the time hadn't come when we need a new story. This was becoming a piece of history and also it seemed to me that once a congregation go through the work and upheaval of building a brand-new church, that building one church is more than enough.

Time for a rest from creating new buildings!

Around that time I went to conference on Edinburgh and was given this piece of advice. Once your church space is regularly  $\frac{3}{4}$  full, your church will not grow. If you want your church to grow you either need to start a new different service, or get a new building. The following Sunday I happened to share this with the congregation. A few days later the church burned down!  
And we ended up having to build a new church building all over again!

The church burnt down.....

Was it me?

No, it was not me!

Was it God?

No, because God doesn't do stuff like that.

It was a faulty extractor fan overheating that caused the fire and all the damage.

Once the second "new" church was built it really was time to get out from behind our walls and into our community. A new project was envisioned and Finn's Place wellbeing centre was born – still a vital part of what we are doing at Langside.

God does not control or cause everything that happens in this world, but God does guide and direct us in every new situation we find ourselves in.

We might think we know what we should be doing but sometimes unlikely circumstances crop up and our plans end up changing suddenly and unexpectedly.

One thing we can be sure of is that God very often guides us circumstantially. God is able to adapt to all the situations we face.

In the reading from John it's clear that the blind man had no idea he would be healed that morning by meeting Jesus, and the so-called religious experts were sure too. Because they had already decided on the rules of engagement. They were sure that God wouldn't heal that man because this was the Sabbath Day and God has to keep to God's own rules.

Of course these rules *were* given by God, weren't they?

It couldn't be that people just made them up, could it.....?

The religious folk thought (like many religious folk always do) they had God sussed, boxed in, controlled and constrained by their teaching, but thankfully God is a lot more generous than they were.

It's one of the big points Jesus wanted to get across to people in his ministry.

The other day Ruth Forsythe shared a saying with me.

*This year churches have given up buildings for Lent!*

And so we have!

But that was not our intention, not our plan at all.

However it's been thrust upon us now and we need to connect with God in the situation we find ourselves in now.

And despite all the worry and trouble of this virus, maybe we can learn some things that are good.

Maybe we can learn to worship in a new way,  
learn to care for each other and relate to one another in a new way,  
and learn to trust God and relate to God more meaningfully too.

Burning down the church was no 'act of God' and this horrible corona virus is no 'act of God'.

Despite what anyone might ever have suggested to you, God doesn't work by doing stuff like this.

And God is certainly not laughing at the devastation and misery caused by this pandemic.

What God **does** do is to come alongside us in difficult times, not just to comfort us when we are suffering, but also to support us and offer us the resources to cope and get through the crisis to the other side. God is also seen in the love and the care and compassion and hard work of everyone who seeks to bring healing and hope.

In the middle of our present situation God is still with us, because God's willingness and ability to support us never changes or wavers or ends.

Let's not think of the virus as a good thing, because that will never be the case, but we can still discover that good is able to be found in unpromising situations, and that as we are forced to alter our plans to adapt to a new reality, God does the same to guide and accompany us along the way.

There's a verse we hear usually at Christmas time but it's always true.

*"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never put it out!"* (John 1:5)