

18th July 2021

Infectious

“The nature of bad news infects the teller.”

William Shakespeare, Anthony and Cleopatra

Given the title of this piece, and the quote that accompanies it, you might be expecting my reflection today to be about the infectiousness of Coronavirus or even the depressing effects of continually being surrounded by bad news. But no! This is about *laughter!*

My wife has a wind-up gramophone which she inherited from her parents. It wouldn't make much on *Bargain Hunt* or *Cash in the Attic*. But it's fun sometimes to dig out old "78s" and listen to the evocative singing of Nelson Eddie and Jeanette MacDonald's *Indian Love Call*, or Will Fyfe's *Keep Right on to the End of the Road*. But best of all for me is the crackly sound of *The Laughing Policeman*, a musical-hall song written by in 1898 George W Johnson and performed by the British artiste, Charles Penrose in the 1920s. The song describes a fat, jolly policeman who can't stop laughing, and has a chorus in which the sound of laughter is made in a sustained semi-musical way by the singer. The first verse and chorus are:

*I know a fat old policeman, he's always on our street,
a fat and jolly red-faced man he really is a treat.
He's too kind for a policeman, he's never known to frown,
and everybody says he's the happiest man in town.*

*Ha ha ha ha ha,
Woo ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha,
Woo ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha,
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha! Ha ha ha!*

I defy anyone to listen to this and not burst into fits of giggles. Why? Because laughter is infectious. It's transmitted from person to person. It transforms a room of people from straight faced to grinning and giggling. Shakespeare *may* right when he says that bad news infects the teller. So all the more reason to celebrate the fact that laughter infects the hearer.

The bible's Book of Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is "a time to weep and a time to laugh." Let's be done with weeping for a time and laugh some more. *That's* the kind of infectiousness that's worthwhile.

A prayer for today

Smiling God, help me to laugh today and spread that laughter to others! Amen.

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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