

Holy Humor Sunday
Sermon Title: I've Got The Joy, Joy, Joy
Salem United Methodist Church
Psalm 4:6-8; John 20:19-31; Philippians 2:1-5,12-18
April 3, 2016
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That song brings back joyful memories for me. I've got the joy joy joy in my heart. Let's keep this Easter party going. Today we set aside time to claim joy as the people of the resurrected Christ. Please pray with me:

Dear God, Today we seek joy in you. Help us to see and know, receive and claim, and live the joy which you make real in our world, in our community, in our church, and in our lives today. We pray that you would speak to our hearts this hour and find a dwelling place there. Amen.

Happiness, joy...the Bible declares it a gift of God in both the Old Testament and the New. The psalmist claims that God has put Gladness in his heart. We recognize joy as one of the fruit of the spirit. In fact, the noun "joy" appears over 50 times in the New Testament and in the Hebrew Bible over 100 times. It's clearly an important part of the Christian experience. Where do we find it? How do we get it? And what do we do with it?

One way to acknowledge joy and happiness in your own life is to look for blessings. We have probably all heard this advice before...count your blessings. The musical finale of *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* features the entire cast singing a song which defines happiness from the children's perspectives. To them, happiness is "tying your shoe for the very first time, two kinds of ice cream, catching a firefly and setting it free" I'm challenging you to define a few blessings in your own life. What is happiness to you? For me, it's when Wholefoods has my favorite couscous on the salad bar, or the sound of my cat snoring, or when absolutely no mail shows up after I was pretty sure I had whizzed past those cameras out there.(phew!) Take a moment to turn to a neighbor or two and share your definition of happiness with each other.

Truly, we are blessed. Yet, when we turn our attention to joy and happiness, we are forced to admit that while we may always desire it, we do not always see it. There is no doubt that we live in a somewhat sad world. We are constantly bombarded with news of tragedy, corruption, injustice, and suffering. We can easily find ourselves calling out like the psalmist, "We can't find goodness anywhere. The light of your face has left us, Lord!" Yet even this lament reminds us of where we can find joy.

The psalmist finds joy which can overcome circumstances in relationship with God. He finds deep down confidence that all is well, no matter what the situation, no matter what the difficulty, no matter what the problem: "I will lie down and fall asleep in peace because you alone, Lord, let me live in safety." One helpful definition of joy from this understanding is this: joy is the flag that flies on the castle of the heart when the King is in residence there. Joy is the

flag that flies on the castle of the heart when the King is in residence there. I love that. When we are in right relationship with God we experience the indwelling of the Spirit which allows us to align our own will with the will of God. This relationship of alignment leads to joy.

Is it any wonder Thomas craved this sort of joy for himself? What do you know about this biblical character- Thomas? Put your heads together and chat with a neighbor about the guy. Tell me what you know and think about the situation we hear in today's story. Go back to your scripture insert if you need it. What is his reputation? Positive or negative- is that fair or unfair? Why was he not there? Was it right to demand a do-over? (Share and discuss)

Thomas could have accepted defeat. He could have been Defeated Thomas instead of doubting Thomas. I prefer Demanding Thomas. It seems to me that Thomas made a choice to seek the source of true joy through a real and personal encounter with Jesus Christ. By accepting Jesus as master and God and by receiving the peace he offered he accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of his life. What follows is joy which permeates every aspect of life. The Holy Spirit dwells within, Joy comes from God ...who lives ... within us. Because of the resurrection we can approach life in victory and joy, not defeat. Because Jesus Christ personally reveals God to us, we can know eternal joy.

The Psalmist teaches us about relationship with God as the source of joy, Thomas helps us understand the pursuit of joy answered by Christ, but what does it look like to really live with joy? Paul helps us with this. He demonstrates Christian joy daily life: in the mundane and in some of the most extreme of circumstances.

Paul teaches his congregation about how Christians are called to live. He shows that Christians are not victims of the circumstance. As a prisoner and missionary Paul's future is uncertain, yet he proclaims rejoice and allow Joy to encompass you! He shows that joy is a choice and attitude. He extends the impact of joy to his congregation. He asks them if they are changed by their faith. "Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?" Are you different people now that you live with this joy? Good. Act like it. "by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together...not being selfish, being humble.... You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had." I'm challenging you to take a look at this list...get your scripture insert and take a moment to ask God to speak to you as you review this list. Which of these directions stands out to you? How might God be directing you through Paul's words? I'm going to give you some silence. Take a moment to reread these words until you get stuck on one of these phrases. Then sit with it for a moment. (short time of silence)

I will not ask you to share aloud right now but I hope that you will carry that word or phrase or message with you today remembering that we are called people...we are Easter people, with joy in our hearts. How will you nurture your relationship with God for joy? How will you embrace the emotional satisfaction of knowing, loving, and following Jesus? How will you live in joy?