

A Cheerful Heart is Good Medicine

Proverbs 17: 22

For some, this is your first Holy Humor Sunday and you are probably wondering what this is all about. For others, you know we have done this service in the past and as soon as you read about it in your newsletter, you had an idea of what to expect or at least remembered what we have done in recent years. And for all of us, hopefully by now, you realize that there is usually a method to our madness. Although we know that some Sundays are little bit crazier than others, I fully admit that this Sunday might have a little more madness than usual

However, there is a good reason behind this service. There is a theological reason behind this service.

You see, we hold this Holy Humor Sunday celebration to remind ourselves that the Empty Tomb has turned our world upside down in unexpected and life giving ways. We have this crazy celebration to remind ourselves that in life, God constantly surprises us with joy, surprises us with laughter. God constantly surprises us each and every day with the gift of hope and new beginnings.

As I have said before, the idea for Holy Humor Sunday did not originate with me. I heard about it from a friend who shared with me how the congregation she serves celebrates the Sunday after Easter. And as I heard her talking about

Holy Humor Sunday, I couldn't help but think how much I would love to try that here at Midway Christian Church.

So here we are in year four of the craziness associated with this service. But it is not just the craziness that we need to take in today. We do Holy Humor Sunday because as people of faith, we need it. We need it desperately in our lives and in our churches.

Here's why I say this: In most congregations, the Sundays after Easter are well, depressing. The crowds are smaller. All the special music has been put away, and there seems to be less joy in our worship service and in our lives. Unfortunately, when it comes to the Sundays after Easter, it seems that we have all started to slide back into our "normal" routines almost as if the Empty Tomb didn't make a difference at all in our lives or in our world.

Well, guess what it is still Easter. We get 50 days of Easter. And Guess what, Jesus is still alive! Just because the world has moved on past the Empty Tomb doesn't mean as people of faith, we have to or that we should.

For us, the resurrection wasn't and isn't a one and done kind of thing. It is an on-going experience of faith which invites us to encounter the Risen Christ each and every day of our lives. The Resurrection is about living into the realization that we don't have to wait until some day in the future to experience the Kingdom of

God. It is right here, right now, inviting us to live in the joy of God's love. Today and all days, our lives should be filled with shouts of joy! Love has overcome hate! God had the last laugh! And new life is here for all of God's creation!

That's actually what's behind Holy Humor Sunday. It is a reclaiming of an ancient church tradition which dates back to the Middle Ages. The custom was for people of faith to gather for picnics, singing and dancing during the weeks which followed Easter. It is a tradition which is rooted in the musings of early church theologians that God played a practical joke on Death by raising Jesus from the grave. Once again, it is a reminder that the Resurrection was not a one and done type of event. It is and will always be an on-going transformation of God's creation. It is the Kingdom of God coming to life through healing and wholeness promised to all of God's people.

So with that in mind, I invite us to turn to our Scripture today and listen with a cheerful heart!

(Read Text)

There is so much to unpack in just these two little lines....Where do we even start?

Maybe we start with the fact that this idea of laughter being good medicine isn't just a saying. There is truth to this wisdom, truth behind this saying. It has

been scientifically proven that laughter is good for our bodies. Studies have shown that when we laugh, our natural relaxation response activates and we immediately calm down. And it has also been scientifically proven that laughter has healing properties. It does this by boosting our immunity and sparking brain connectivity. Studies have even been done that prove laughter can increase certain cell levels, cells which are known to attack cancer.

Is that fascinating? For years, doctors have done studies where they compare certain patients' recovery and healing. And what they have discovered is that the patients with the more positive attitude, patients who can find joy among the pain, patients who laugh, these are the particular patients who have healed faster than others.

The other amazing thing scientists have discovered is that laughter is not only good for our bodies. It is good for our spirits as well. Science is showing now that we as humans instinctively seek out joyous people, that when we hear laughter, we automatically move towards the sound. What science is proving nowadays is that the main purpose of laughter is to bring people together.

But you know what the funny thing in all this really is...science is just catching up to what we knew as people of faith all along. We know that there is joy in the midst of the pain. We know that there new life in the midst of darkness. We

know that our everyday lives are full of holy moments, moments which bring laughter to our lips and cheer to our hearts. We know all this because we have a promise from our God, a promise which tells us that love will overcome, a promise which tells the end is never really the end, instead it is usually just a new beginning. We know all this because we have a promise from our God which tells us that God will always have the last word.

You see, this is what our faith story tells us. It tells us that laughter, joy, celebration are all interwoven into moments of our lives as people of faith. Our faith story tells us that from the beginning, when God takes such delight in God's creation, to when Sarah laughs because she is told that she would have a baby at the age of 90, to when the psalms call us to sing, to dance, to be glad, to find joy in our everyday lives, to when the Gospels tell us that Jesus welcomes all to the Table and in doing so, extends the joy of acceptance to one and all, to when Paul stands amazed at the gift of God's grace, from the beginning, lived out now and promised to us in the future...our faith story tells us that there is hope. There is love. There is grace. And there is joy. Time and time again, our faith story tells us that despite what this world may believe, God will always have the last laugh.

Now please don't hear me say that as Christians, as people of faith, we are to wander around with a fake smile plastered on our face, gritting our teeth while we

grumble. We aren't supposed to be unrealistically cheerful, pretending sunshine and rainbows coming out of our ears.

What we are called to be is joy filled people, people who shine the light of Christ, people who bring healing and wholeness to all of God's creation. We can do all that for one simple reason and that reason being... We know that we abide in God's love always.

You see, again, we know something this world does not understand. We've experienced something that this world just does not get. We have experienced the power and the gift of new life found in the resurrection. We have been transformed by God's love. This is what turns our sorrows into shouts of joy. This is what brings us hope.

We know that no matter what life brings our way, the good, the bad, the ugly, the breath-takingly beautiful, God is there, guiding us, leading us. God is there, loving us, showing us grace. God is there, welcoming us home. And nothing, nothing, nothing will ever separate us from God. Nothing will ever separate us from God's love.

So no we don't live as naïve people, pretending everything is okay when it is not.

No, rather what we do as people of faith is we choose to live as people who understand that our joy is grounded in the presence of God in our lives, a presence which centers us, a presence which reminds us who we are and whose we are, a presence which reminds us we are loved more than we could ever imagine,

As people of faith, we choose to live our lives reflecting the love, the grace and the joy of our Risen Savior because after all, our God had the last laugh.

Amen.