

## “Fullness of Joy”

Psalm 16: 11a

For some, this is your first Holy Humor Sunday and you are probably wondering what this is all about. For others, you know we held this service for the last couple of years and as soon as you read in your newsletter what this Sunday was, you had an idea of what to expect or at least remembered what we did from previous years’ services. And for all of us, hopefully by now, you realize that there is usually a method to the madness, although some Sundays are little bit crazier than others, especially when the preacher intentionally invites chaos to come walking through the door.

I fully admit that this Sunday might have a little more madness than usual but there is still a reason for having an upside down worship service. It is a good reason. It is a theological reason. It is the reason which turns our sorrow into shouts of joy.

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

Two years ago was our first year with Holy Humor Sunday. There were so many positive comments from church members about the service. Sure, it is something different. And sure it is like herding cats on this Sunday, especially for a type A preacher who likes lists and thrives on order.

But in our conversations surrounding Holy Humor Sunday with the wider congregation, we realized it wasn't just about the craziness of this Sunday that everyone experienced and enjoyed. One of the main comments from the congregation to the Worship Team was "It is so good to know we can laugh in church, that we don't have to always be so serious about our faith. We like the unpredictability of this service because it reminds us that no matter what life throws our way, we can still find joy in knowing that God is there.

I have to tell you, each and every year as the Worship Team figures out the special Sundays we are going to celebrate as part of our tradition, we always ask, "Do we want to do Holy Humor Sunday again this year?" And the response is always yes. As I have thought about this, I have come to understand that this

confirmation of the craziness that surrounds this service answers something bigger than just the need to laugh in church. As people of faith, we do Holy Humor Sunday because, we need it. We need it desperately in our lives and in our churches.

Because you see, in most congregations, the Sunday after Easter is well, depressing. The crowds are smaller, the lilies are still here, but they are starting to droop. It seems that on the Sunday after Easter, we all start 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.

But that isn’t how it should be. And that certainly is not how we should act as people of faith. The Resurrection wasn’t a one and done kind of thing. It is an on-going experience that invites us to encounter the Risen Christ each and every day of our lives. It is 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.

That’s actually what’s behind Holy Humor Sunday. It is a reclaiming of an ancient church tradition that dates back to the Middle Ages. The custom was for people of faith to gather for picnics, laughter, singing and dancing during the week that followed Easter. It is a tradition that is rooted in the musing 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 through healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

So with that in mind, I invite us to turn to our Scripture today and experience the fullness of joy that can only be found when we center ourselves in the presence of God!

Read the TEXT

Yes, I know that this psalm contains other verses and that I am in danger of committing something I caution us all the time not to do, which is to take a text out of context. But I couldn't help it. This one verse has stayed with me all week. And time and time again, its truth has centered me and reminded me of the gift we are all given as people of faith.

Let me explain: It started on Monday morning. After a crazy 40 days and a wonderful Easter service, on Monday morning, I was exhausted. But in my tiredness, God gave me a gift...the gift of waking up and experiencing God's creation coming alive. Early on Monday morning, I found myself, sitting at our dining room table, thinking of all I had to do this week, when suddenly in the quiet, God's handiwork came to light. Birds chirping, A rabbit hopping across our yard,

the sunlight streaming through, making everything new. And I thought, “This peace of mind cannot be bought, yet it is being freely given to me, to us by a God who loves us more than we will ever know. In that moment, my heart was full, full of joy, full of peace, full of hope.

Then later that day, I found joy at our Admin Team meeting, talking about the church’s upcoming budget. Yes, I know...an odd place to find joy but hear me out.

At our meeting, the conversation wasn’t just about money. It was about ministry. We were talking about how we can share our gifts with our community. We were asking the question of how do we reach out to those who don’t even know we are here.

And this is where I found my joy, this change of conversation for us as a congregation. Because you see, when I first arrived at Midway Christian Church, the budget was only about money. It was only about the needs of the congregation. There was no vision beyond income and expense. The budget was more about survival than mission.

But this year, the conversation changed. It was more about recognizing the Kingdom of God in our midst. This is a turnaround this for us...to realize that God has shown us the path of life, to know that we are working to figure out how we

can share the fullness of peace and love with others, how we can be people of WELCOME in our community for those who have not found such a place of grace. That we are not merely here to survive but to thrive as a place of Welcome and hope. The conversations around the table as we planned out the budget for next year were about recognizing the hurt and brokenness in our community and wondering how we as people of faith could respond to this need.

In that moment, I realized something I knew with my head but had forgotten with my heart. That no matter, how big our programs really are, no matter how many resources we may actually have, if we are not living out the experience of God's grace and love in our lives, then we have failed in living out the Gospel message as the people of God. Our starting point should always be that God has given us everything we need to experience the fullness of life right here and right now, no ifs ands or buts. All we have to do is to open our eyes, to open our hearts to the surprising gifts of God's joy that surround us each and every day to know that this is true.

But the fullness of God's joy didn't stop there. As the week progressed, God was constantly reminding me who I am, reminding me whose I am as a Beloved Child of God. God was constantly showing me the path of life laid out before me. This week I was reminded over and over again that when I embrace the peace of God, I can truly experience the grace of God given to me by a God who loves me

more than I can ever imagine. In these glimpses of hope this week, I discovered or should I say, rediscovered the fullness of my joy as a person of faith.

A joy that comes from something this world does not understand, something that this world just does not get. As people of faith, we've experienced the power, the life of the resurrection. We've experienced God's love. It is what centers us in the fullness of our joy. It 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 and God's love.

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 faces, gritting our teeth while we pretend everything is okay. I am definitely not saying that. Never are we suppose to be unrealistically cheerful, pretending sunshine and rainbows coming out of our ears.

What I am saying is that we are called to be joyful people. We know the truth the psalmist reminds us of in this one single verse. That Truth being that God has shown us the path of life, that in God's presence there is fullness of joy. Fullness of joy....a gift that everyone wants and a gift that this world promises to us

each and every day if we would only buy this product or have more "stuff" in our lives. With this one line, the psalmist reminds us that nothing can ever fill the voids in our lives, no matter how much we buy or try to keep up with others. As people of faith, we know that only in God's presence, a presence that centers us, a presence that reminds us who we are and whose we are, a presence that reminds us we are loved more than we could ever imagine, can we find fullness of joy. We know this to be true because we live our lives reflecting the love, the grace and the joy of our Risen Savior who had the last laugh. Thanks be to God! Amen.