

“Shouts of Joy”

Psalm 126

For some, this is your first Holy Humor Sunday and you are probably wondering what this is all about. For others, you know we did this service last year 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 did last year. 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, 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 it is still a good thing that we are having an upside down worship service. There is a good reason behind this service. There is a theological reason behind this service. This reason is what turns our sorrow into shouts of joy.

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.

Last year was our first year with our Holy Humor Sunday celebration and this year as we started preparing for today's service, meeting we asked should we hold this service again, there were so many positive comments from church members that we thought, "Why not?" 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 with the wider congregation, about Holy Humor Sunday celebration, we realized it wasn't just the craziness of this Sunday that everyone liked. 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 Sunday after Eater is well, depressing. The crowds are smaller, the lilies are still here, but they are starting to droop. 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 Sunday

after Easter, it seems that 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. I even saw a meme in Facebook that said, “Come back to church this Sunday and pretend it is still Easter and Jesus is still alive.”

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 that 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 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 shouts of joy!

(Read Text)

I have to tell you, this is one of my favorite Psalms. I love how it moves us as people of faith from past, to present, to future reality. Although it is one of the shorter psalms, in its few lines, it gives a means of looking back and remembering...remembering all the times when God acted in our lives, remembering the times when it seemed like we were on the verge of losing hope only to realize that somehow, someway, hope had found us and brought us back to life.

I love how this psalm reminds us that we are more than just our moments. It reminds us that we are people of joy first and foremost. With its very lines, this psalm tell us just when we thought things had come to an end, leaving us in darkness and despair, God surprises with a new beginning. God makes a way out of no way!

One of the Biblical scholars says that in reading Psalm 126, as people of faith we are reminded that we are called to live as people of memory and as people of hope. That's seems like a pretty strange combination doesn't it? Memory and Hope. They seem like completely two opposite ends of the spectrum of life. But as I lived with this odd combination this week, I have come to realize that being both people of memory and people of hope is no stranger than anything we do as people of faith.

Think about it: We worship a Risen Savior whose very death is seen by the world as a form of punishment while when we gaze upon the cross, we experience the grace and love of God. We worship a Risen Savior who while living here on earth broke bread not with the powerful and mighty but with tax collectors and prostitutes. He broke bread with the people on the margins, the people others would rather ignore or forget. As people of faith, we worship a Risen Savior who each and every day gives us glimpses of the Kingdom of God that is in our midst but we know it is not fully realized yet. Paul tells us that now we see in the mirror dimly but soon, soon, when the Kingdom of God comes to fruition here on Earth, we will see things clearly.

We are a people of seemingly strange combinations, the biggest one being that we worship a Risen Savior who has turned our sorrow into shouts of joy, who

has turned our tears into new beginnings. We worship a Risen Savior who shows us time and time again that love will always overcome hate.

When the world looks at us as people of faith, they see a strange combination and we are okay with that. We know we are a strange combination of hope, love, grace, sorrow, pain, brokenness, and joy all rolled into one community of faith. This is a good thing! This is a life-changing thing! This is what makes us the Body of Christ here on earth, working to reconcile all of God's creation.

Because, you see, in this very strange combination of here but not yet, in this strange combination of memory and hope, in this strange combination of brokenness and joy, we hold on to the promise that God will act to bring healing and wholeness to all of God's creation because we know that God has been doing so since the beginning of time.

This is what allows us to anticipate the joy of God's Kingdom being realized here on earth. This is what allows this joy to not be just something for a future time but to become our reality. This is what allows joy to become our mood of operation as people of faith.

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.

We are called to be joyful people, shining the light of Christ, bringing healing and wholeness to all of God's creation for one simple reason. We know that we abide in God's love always. We know something this world does not understand. We've experienced something that this world just does not get. We've experienced the power, the life of the resurrection. We've experienced God's love. That's what turns our sorrows into shouts of joy. That's what brings us hope. 4

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.

We don't live as naïve people, pretending everything is okay when it is not. We live as people of memory...remembering all the times when God has acted in the past to restore us, to renew us, to meet us in our sorrow. AND we live as people of hope...celebrating the larger framework of God's purpose and promise. As people of memory and hope, we live in the vision of the Kingdom of God made realized here on earth. We celebrate that the Resurrection is not and will never be a

one and done event. As people of faith, as people of joy abiding in God's love and grace, we live as ones who worship a Risen Savior who had the last laugh.

Thanks be to God! Amen.