

“Ya Gotta Laugh”
Sermon by Rev. Patricia Walz
August 23, 2020

Scripture Readings:

Pastor HeyYoung Horton

1st Thessalonians is an early letter the apostle wrote in 51 AD to a new church founded during Paul’s ministry there. It is assumed that the new church included some Jews, with the majority probably being Gentiles, or as we would say today “un-churched.” Thessalonica was a bustling seaport city and an important communication and trade center and this was a thriving new church. Paul had had to leave Thessalonica abruptly as a mob of protesters upset with Paul’s teachings formed a rioting mob that went before authorities. Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians was sent to the new church to praise their perseverance and to encourage them through persecution with the promise of a better future.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18 (NIV)

¹² Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonishes you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

Ecclesiastes 8:15 (NIV)

¹⁵ So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun.

Sermon:

Participants:

Patti Walz

Tricia Trout

Beth Fisher

Max Fisher

Pat Cornell

Percussion: Norm Dorrell

Spirit! The quality of courage! Energy! Determination or assertiveness.

Holy Spirit: Empowers us to do the things that Jesus did. Gives directions. Provides answers. Counselor. Helper. God's way of being spiritually active in the world. God's power in action.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit: Being filled with Christ. To be walking in "the light" discipleship, bearing "fruit."

The "fruit of the spirit" – Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Self-control, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Love. (pause) And Joy.

Expressions of Joy: Excitement! Being "pumped!" (pump fist into the air), Rejoicing!, Hallelujah! Celebration (applaud and jump up and down), Music! Singing! Poetry! Psalms. A warming of the heart (hand on heart), Movement, Dance (do a dance move) Showing appreciation.

Words of thanksgiving: Congratulations! That's fantastic! Wow! I thank God for you! Thank you, Lord, for what we have received! Joy! A smile...

Laughter.

In the 1950's, there was a movie named "Singing in the Rain" and there was a song in it that is still well known among theater people. It is called "Make 'Em Laugh!" I'd like to share some of the dialog and lyrics with you.

(Dialog and Speak-sing with percussion):

Come on now, snap out of it. You can't let a little thing like this get you down!

What's the 1st thing you learn, "The show must go on!"

Come rain, come shine, come snow, come sleet, the show must go on!"

The world is so full of a number of things

I'm sure we should be as happy as...

But are we? No! X

Definitely no! X Positively no! X Decidedly no! X uh-uh. cymbal

Short people have long faces and long people have short faces.

Big people have little humor and little people have no humor at all, *drum roll*

And in the words of the bard Samuel J. Snodgrass as he was about to be lead to the guillotine:

Add drum set:

Make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh,

Don't you know everyone wants to laugh.

My dad said, "Be an actor my son,

But be a comical one!"

Make 'em roar, make 'em scream,

Take a fall, butta wall, split a seam.

You could start by pretending you're a dancer with grace,

Then you wiggle 'till they're gig-gl-ing all over the place.

Then you get a great big cu-stard pie in the face,

Make 'em laugh, Make 'em laugh, Make 'em laugh!

Man! That sounds good doesn't it! If only we could always be in such a good mood. If only

we could forget about all our worries, if only we could roar and bust a gut, and laugh when

things are tough! And this isn't always easy to do, particularly at this time, in this place, in

this community, in these days mixed with separation, anxiety, violence, and injustice.

Especially at this time of unrest and uncertainty. So what do we do?

If you ever want to read about a man who seems to have the ultimate optimism in bad times,

read about Paul in the Book of Acts. Read Paul's letters, whether written by him or his

followers. There is evidence that happiness and joy can prevail even when ostracized,

verbally abused, imprisoned, ill, beaten, run out of town, and even facing death by the hands

of others.

In the reading from 1 Thessalonians today that Hey Young shared, Paul says to work hard, hold others in high regard with love. Live in peace and speak out against those who are disruptive. Encourage the disheartened and help the weak. Be patient with everybody. Don't pay back a wrong with another wrong. Strive to do what is good for us – and for the common good of everyone. Wow. We've been hearing a lot of these same words recently, haven't we? Paul's words of advice are challenge us now -and the recipients of Paul's letters were certainly challenged as well – discrimination, rioting, violence, the threat of imprisonment and even death.

And then Paul says, “Let us rejoice! Let us pray always! And give thanks!” Again, Wow...

You see, Paul had the assurance through his profound calling and transformation that God really was present in the midst of terrible times. He had the assurance that there was something better and much more powerful than evil. He knew that light would overshadow darkness. He understood who Jesus really was and what that meant for us if we follow his ways. Paul had the assurance that in spite of everything, it is possible to have joy and community and goodness and fun and laughter. And he set out to share what he knew with everyone else, including us.

So, here we are gathered together and I'm going to ask you – how many of you have been amazed at the humor, inventiveness, and creativity that we are finding on the internet through youtube, twitter, tiktok, and so on, since Covid? I have laughed out loud at families dancing

in the kitchen, a handmade hand puppet swallowing cars passing the window, a whole bedroom filled with potatoes laid next to each other with Adele's song "Someone Like You" playing in the background. SO creative! And so joyful! Aren't people amazing?

Then there's "First Time Hearing" on Youtube – Tim and Fred Williams are 22 years old and grew up in a black neighborhood in Gary, Indiana. Until recently, they had only heard Rap music their entire lives. One of them heard a Frank Sinatra song and was amazed. So now, they have a whole series on youtube called "First Time Hearing" - and we get to see them sitting in their bedroom hearing for the first time Janis Joplin, Phil Collins, Dolly Parton's "Jolene" (really excited – they love her passion and the storytelling), Queen, Pavarotti, Whitney Houston, Purple Rain by Prince, "Take Me To Church," and so on... Their shock and joy is contagious and wonderful to see. And doing these videos and hearing other music they say has given them a chance to open up more. Fred says they're learning a lot and going deeper into the artists' works. They are finding joy in a pandemic and know they are giving joy. And this is a quote: "We just smile, have fun, and laugh together." Now, think of the possibilities – could something like this lead to communities having a better understanding of each other? Could it lead to supporting, respecting, and living together peacefully? Wow...

And then there is the absolute best PR for a religious organization I have seen in a very long time. YouTube's "Dancing Priest Does Hamilton." It is AWESOME! If you haven't seen it, I highly recommend it.

The Mayo Clinic says that “Laughter really IS the best medicine.” It contributes to stress relief stimulating many organs including your heart, lungs and muscles by increasing the endorphins released by your brain. “A rollicking laugh fires up and then cools down your stress response resulting in a good, relaxed feeling.” It soothes tension and reduces physical symptoms of stress. It improves your immune system (and we all need that!) It relieves pain. It increases personal satisfaction and makes it easier to cope with difficult situations. It helps you connect with other people. It improves your mood and lessens depression and anxiety. It improves your sense of humor.

I had a couple of female parishioner friends in my former parish who had been rather “down.” So, they decided to try goat yoga – but instead of doing any yoga, they rolled around on the ground laughing hysterically while playing with the goats who were hopping all over them.

So, I think old King Solomon really knew what he was talking about in his Book of Ecclesiastes. First of all, he had learned that a life without God was meaningless. But he also knew that life was difficult and full of challenges so he commended, or praised, the enjoyment of life, “Because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun.”

And Paul, too, had learned that life without God was meaningless and in spite of hardships, was filled with joy.

Friends, today I pray that we, too, be able to find all the joy that God gifts and surrounds us with every day. Amen.

Our musicians are now going to share a song by Switchfoot called “Dare You To Move” We can’t sing, so I’m going to invite you to do something different. Follow what I do, if you are able and I promise it will be enlightening, fun, and possibly a new experience. Here we go!

Song: “Dare You To Move” by Switchfoot