

“MESSAGE IN THE MUSIC: ‘HAPPY!’”

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Philippians 4:4-7

John 2:1-11

Today’s a big day in the life of our church – it’s Fall Kickoff Sunday! It’s the day that the Chancel Choir comes back, Sunday School starts, and the Youth Group moves into their fall schedule. When I was thinking about today earlier this week, I thought about all my years as a child and youth in Sunday School – a few of them spent right here in this church. I thought of all the wonderful teachers I had, and things like the felt boards on which the Biblical stories were lived out, and shoe boxes made into Biblical dwelling places, and plaster of paris praying hands. I thought about the rooms we met in – rooms with tiny tables and tiny chairs just right for tiny children, bright posters on the walls, and invariably, in almost every Sunday School room I remember, a picture of Jesus. Most often that picture of Jesus was the one painted by a man named Warner Sallman called “The Head of Christ” – if I showed it to you you’d recognize it immediately – Jesus with a glow around him, with long brown hair and a beard, looking off into the distance.

It’s a great portrait of Jesus, but it’s not my favorite. My favorite is one called “Laughing Jesus.” Amazingly, I had never seen it until I was in seminary, and I was immediately drawn to it, because Jesus was a man of joy, and the painting radiates that joy.

Search the Gospels and you’ll see the source of Jesus’ joy. He found joy in time spent with His Heavenly Father. He found joy in solitude. He found joy in being with His family and friends. He found joy when the sick were healed, when hearts were opened, when love was shared. He was a man of great joy.

And it seems He loved a good party. He surely loved all those dinners that He had with the disciples and His friends, like Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and in today’s Gospel lesson we find Him at a wedding with His family.

You know, Jesus lived in a tough world and faced tough times over and over again – even to the point of death – but in spite of it all, still He was joyful, He was happy. Because His joy, His happiness was not superficial, it was grounded in God’s love and God’s blessings, and the knowledge that happiness and joy are not temporary highs on the journey of life, but the underlying current, the ever-present assurance running through the lives of all who believe in God.

That's why we too are people of joy and happiness. Like Jesus, we live in a tough world and face tough times – but they cannot steal our joy. Many, many years ago, as one man was facing death, he wrote these words to a friend:

“It's a bad world, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people are Christians – and I am one of them.”
(On-line, sermonillustrations.com, “Joy,” *Today in the Word*, June 1988, p. 18)

And so too are you and I, friends. We are children of God, disciples of Christ, people of joy – deep, never-ending joy. We, as the passage from Philippians that we heard this morning said, “rejoice in the Lord always.”

And there are some days that we rejoice more than others – and this is one of them. You know, I was amazed this week, when I was meeting with some other clergy in the town over lunch, and one of them told me that she hates this week every year. I couldn't believe it! She told me that it's crazy busy, and there's so much to get done, and it's so stressful – and she about died when I told her I loved this week – it's one of my favorite Sundays of the year!

I love it! I love the parking lot being filled again, after summer weeks of it not being so filled. I love the halls packed with people, and the decibel level rising substantially as friends greet each other, and teachers welcome students. I love seeing and hearing the little children run to their classrooms, and I even love the noise that comes down through the ceiling above me from the kindergarten class every week! I love looking over there and seeing the choir back and hearing their joyful sounds! I love overhearing the youth talk about beating each other in tonight's scavenger hunt! I love it all! It makes me incredibly happy, and I know it makes you happy today – I see it on your faces and I watch you hug each other and smile as you talk with each other.

It's simply a joy-filled day in this wonderful community of faith! And I love it! It's so wonderful, and I'm so happy, that, well, I feel like we need to let loose and celebrate!

(Pharrell Williams' “Happy” on screen)

Clap along if you feel like it!

Oh, we're happy! We're have a God who loves us, a Savior who gave His life for us, a Spirit who dwells with us, and we have each other! This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be happy! Amen and Amen!

