April 19th, 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Easter Sunday

10:30am

Wilderness of Coronavirus – Virtual Church

**Inexpressible, Glorious Joy**

I. The Last Thing on our minds...

When you read the title of the sermon, you might think – joy is the last thing on my mind. And look at all this pain, the heartache, people losing their lives and their jobs. Is having joy right now, is that blasphemous? Is it wrong?

And the truth, even as we read it in Scripture is – no, joy is not wrong, even in the most challenging of times. We can live in a ‘Yes, and’ culture. We can live with both sadness and joy, we can hold both at the same time. We can be grateful we have job, but also sad about how that job has changed. We can be thankful for our families, but also admit that spending this much time with them can make us cranky. We can help others in this challenging time, but we also can take time to renew and revive ourselves.

And if you need to live in sadness right now? That’s ok. If you need to live in anger right now? That’s ok. If you need something to laugh about and have joy? That’s ok. Your feelings and emotions do not negate the realities of this world – you feel what you feel, and this Sunday is an opportunity to say in the midst of the sadness and anger, to take a big deep breath and maybe laugh.

You see, laughter is healing and I believe it is also holy. Think about Jesus’ first miracle – when he turned water into wine. The first miracle was ultimately a time of joy – a wedding where love was being sealed in the covenant of marriage and when they ran out of wine, our Saviour made sure that they had enough wine to go around.

I imagine there’s many other places in Jesus’ life where laughter was real, but not reported in our Scripture. As both human and divine, one would imagine he might laugh with his disciples, his brothers on the journey, and he might smile or have a joke himself. In fact, I find this reality pretty reassuring, because I don’t know if I could believe in a Savior that only lived with sadness – I need a Savior I can relate to, one that feels the breadth of emotions that all humans do.

II. Old Testament

And there’s humor to be found in the Old Testament too. Often, we think of the Old Testament as the place where God takes out anger on the wicked and vengeful. But, you have to dig deep to find the stories where some of humanity takes over.

I love thinking about when Sarah, married to Abraham, when she laughed. She actually laughed at the idea that she would ever carry a child. She laughed at the message, a laughter of disbelief, but laughter all the same.

There is also humor that we do not see immediately, but humor in it’s own context for the readers of the day. If you dig into the Hebrew Scriptures and into the Hebrew culture, scholars say you can find idioms and witty lines throughout the first Testament.

III. 1 Peter

And so, here we have, in our Scripture reading today, a wonderful example of that reality – holding sadness and joy at the same time. 1 Peter was written with theme of God’s sacrifice on the cross and the meaning and the pain of that redemption. Yet, right here in the Scripture, we see the permission given: it reads, “You rejoice, even if now you have had to suffer various trials” and it continues, “you believe in him and you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.” These folks were also facing tremendous trials, yet they were able to have indescribable and glorious joy all the same. If that’s the case, I think we can too.

IV. Godly Permission

So, we’ve been given Godly permission to laugh and smile, perhaps even encouraged to, in times that are tough. Laughter is healing, it is holy. You’ve heard it said, “Laughter is the best medicine.” Reports show, varying in reliability, evidence that laughter boosts the immune system, it allows for endorphins to rise which may alleviate pain, it strengthens our resilience, and it brings us together as a people. Laughter does the body, mind, and soul, so much good, and God gives us the gift of joy, so let us embrace it.

V. How now?

You might ask yourself, how can I embrace joy in such a time like this? I think it’s a matter of changing your mindset to some extent. One of our congregants has a sign she puts up that says, “There’s always, always something to be grateful for.” When I ask for the joys and concerns in our community, like a hostage situation, I will not go into prayer until I hear a joy from the congregation. Part of being able to carry sadness and joy at the same time is a mindset that is looking for comic relief at the same time as you hold onto the challenges.

And, as a side bar – if you cannot have joy right now – that’s ok. What we are going through is a global pandemic and it is also a global trauma – our minds and bodies are working on survival mode. I don’t want you to feel guilty if you can’t feel joy, but I also don’t want you to reprimand yourself either for having joy. Joy is a gift, and if you can receive that gift, it’s one that can carry you through these days.

So, part of it is a mindset change, but it’s also a habitual change too. I feel like I say this often but – turn off the news. Be aware and be informed, but give yourself a break. I’ve been watching some comedy specials on Netflix and there’s a comedy group called ‘Dry Bar’ on YouTube that has clean and funny humor. Make time to be with your friends – in a different way, maybe you can use zoom or skype and make funny faces at one another as you catch up. Make sure to get outside, even if it’s a cloudy day, to feel the grass underfoot and to acknowledge that things are still blossoming and growing no matter what. Make a routine – a morning routine, an evening routine, a tea break, a time to listen to music – chart it, write it down, and if you don’t meet all the routine goals – that’s ok, it’s guilt-free, it’s just a way to try to find some normalcy in your life.

So laugh. Don’t feel bad about laughing. Laughing is holy. Laughing is healing. Laughing at awful corny jokes may make us roll our eyes, but our shoulders drop a little and the tension subsides as we laugh. Be intentional, find the things that make you laugh or make you happy and do those things.

And one of the benefits of living in Christian community is, when you can’t laugh – we stand alongside you. When you burst out into laughter – we will laugh so hard our sides will hurt. We are in this journey together, and we will get through it together, and hopefully some loving and holy humor will accompany us on the journey too. Amen.