

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Find Joy Again!

Sunday, August 5, 2018

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1 Timothy 6:17

There are many hysterical stories associated with my parents and family. Over time you may hear a few of them from the pulpit. Today, I am going to share one that has been the source of great laughter over the years. The event occurred one weekend when my parents drove me to a tennis tournament in another city. After my match, I was hungry, so my dad drove us to Shoney's. I don't know if they are still around, but they used to have a big breakfast buffet.

My dad loved to eat. It was a real hobby for him. As a result, he had the "Dunlop" disease. His belly "dun-lopped" over his belt. When he sat down to eat he would often unbutton his pants so his belly could breathe. This day at Shoney's was no different. He happily brought back two plates of food to the table, unbuttoned his pants and commenced the eating. When he finished he picked up the two plates and went back to the buffet for seconds. However, he forgot to do one very important thing – button up his pants. So, halfway to the buffet in front of God and everybody my dad's pants fell down to his ankles! There he was in the middle of Shoney's sporting his tighty whities. I noticed a lady near my dad spit out her pancakes in horror. I am just glad he was wearing underwear that day! I was a teenage kid at the time and I am still scarred by it. My mom turned purple with laughter.

My dad could not use his hands because he was holding two plates. So, the only thing he could do was shuffle his way back to the table. When he got to the table he threw down the plates and said to us, "I'll be in the car!" Now, I don't know if that Shoney's still exists. They may have gone out of business the next day. If they are still around you know they are still talking about the man who dropped his pants in the middle of the restaurant.

Such laughter and fun has always been a part of my family. I love to laugh, and you need to

know that I have a very loud laugh. I do a lot of things loud. If I think something is funny I really think it is funny! And that is a good thing I guess because someone once said that the sound of heaven is not singing but laughter.

The holiness of laughter reminds me of a story about C.S Lewis. A group of theologians and scholars once cornered the great Christian thinker and asked him, "What is the most important theological discovery you have ever made?" Lewis smiled and responded, "I exist to enjoy God's enjoyment of me." Did you hear that? God enjoys you! God wants you to enjoy him, to enjoy life, to enjoy the world he has created, to enjoy the people he has put in your life.

Scripture backs up God's call to enjoy life in 1st Timothy 6:17: **"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."**

A long, long time ago a group of people in the church got together and thought it was important to put together a list of the most important beliefs of Christianity. They called it "Catechism." But they soon discovered that the list was too long and difficult to memorize, so they came up with a "Short Catechism." This was to be a summary of the key beliefs of our faith. Do you want to know how this shorter catechism begins? "What is the chief end of humankind? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever!"

Ironically, I come across so many people who won't allow God into their lives because they think God is going to make them give up fun. Many misguided Christians have perpetuated this nonsense. They give off the impression that to become a Christian means the party is over – that being spiritual means being miserable.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, to become a Christian means the party is just beginning. When you have the joy of Christ in your heart you can't help but smile and have a good time. After all, God created joy and fun. It was his idea! So, the closer we get to God the more joy we have.

God created us to play and to enjoy the life he created! I would go so far as to say that God requires us to have fun. I believe one of the reasons Christians and churches burn out is they lose their sense of play. They lose their joy.

Jesus tells us so. Remember that scene in the gospels when Jesus was teaching while a bunch of playful kids ran toward him. The sour disciples were appalled. You can imagine their reaction. "Children ought to be seen and not heard. Where are their parents? Can't they see these kids are interrupting Jesus? Get these kids out of here!"

The Bible says that Jesus became very angry at the disciples. He felt the kids were treated unfairly. He said, "What are you doing? Let the children come to me. Don't get in their way. In fact, unless you can receive the Kingdom like these kids, you will never be able to enter it."

I have always thought that was an amazing statement from Christ. But having Paul has helped me to truly understand and experience its meaning. Children are receptive, dependent and trusting. They bring nothing but themselves and their joy. Jesus says that unless we are able to receive God and his Kingdom like that we will never understand God or life.

It has been said that "God is happiest when his children are at play." I believe that. You see, the most beautiful sound in the world to me is the sound of my son Paul's laughter. It goes straight to my soul and often brings me to tears. Now if I receive that much joy from Paul's laughter and joy, imagine how much joy God receives from the laughter and joy of all his children. God is happiest when his children are at play.

I was reminded of this yesterday when I was playing with Paul at the pool. We were bouncing him up and down in the water. I closed my eyes and listened to the children laughing, splashing and playing. I thought, "This is the sound of the kingdom."

But soon I really had to practice what I preached. Paul's older cousins were with us and they begged me to go down the big water slide with

them. I had not seen any adults on it all day, but I decided that I could not say no and then preach this sermon. So I began to walk to the slide with them. This may be too much information for you but I have hair all over my body. It is all over my arms and back. And all the kids going to the slide were looking at me like, "What are you doing here? Put on a shirt!" I looked at one kid and said, "You didn't believe Sasquatch existed did you?"

So I went down the slide and it was glorious. I went really fast because on those slides the more weight you are carrying the faster you go. I made a big splash and had to ride it again. But I wasn't the only one who was living out today's message at the pool. So was Spencer Drury. He wasn't sitting around next to the pool playing with his cell phone. He was showing off his amazing diving skills in front of us! He jumped off the diving board doing triple back flips into the water. And you should have seen the smile on his face. We were all smiling.

The day at the pool reminded of something G.K. Chesterton wrote. Chesterton was a profound Christian writer who inspired C.S. Lewis. He wrote something that I have never been able to forget: "God is the last child left in the universe." He said the rest of us have just lost our joy. I have thought a lot about those words and I believe Chesterton was on to something. When we read Genesis we see that joy radiated through God as He created the universe. When God created you and me, there was great joy in His heart. For example, do you think when God thought about creating a daisy, He just said, "Um, daisies be"? I don't think so!

Tony Campolo talks about the time when his grandson was just a little boy and he would play with him on his knee. He would bounce him up and down, lift him up into the air, and bring him down to the ground. Campolo said that every time he would do this his grandson would say, "Do it again, Pop! Do it again!" And Campolo would do it again. Of course, his grandson would say to him once more, "Do it again, Pop! Do it again!"

Campolo says that when God created that first daisy something childlike inside the heart of God said, "Do it again! Do it again!" And after the 4th and 5th daisy God said to himself, "Do it again! Do it again!" And after the 50 billionth, trillionth daisy God was jumping up and down, clapping His

hands saying, "Do it again! Do it again!" We have a God of joy, fun, and play!

But something happened to our world. We lost our joy. We lost our sense of fun and laughter. Sin and cynicism crept in and caused us to lose our ability to play. God wanted us to get our joy back, so he decided to come to us in Jesus Christ. One of the things God said to us in Jesus was, **"I have come that you might have life and have it in all of its abundance" (John 10:10).**

In Jesus God was showing us his joyful personality so that we would get our joy back. At first, the world really did not know how to respond to this. We see an example of this in Luke 7 when Jesus speaks to the Pharisees, the supposed experts of the Jewish Law. They thought they knew everything there was to know about God. Jesus comes along and says, "You just don't get it. I come eating, drinking and having a good time and you accuse me of being a glutton, drunkard and a friend to sinners and tax collectors."

Someone once said that basically Jesus was accused of being a party animal! They thought Jesus was playing too hard. They thought they had figured God out, but they hadn't. They thought God was not into fun, games, and play, but they were wrong. They just could not see that Jesus was trying to get us to enjoy life again.

Do you know what Jesus first miracle was in John? It occurred in a small town called Cana at a wedding party. Now, a wedding party back then could go on for an entire week! Imagine getting that bill! Jesus was invited to this party. So, I want you to appreciate this. One of the first scenes of Jesus in John is not him teaching in the plains or holding a sick person's hand; it is Jesus at a party!

Well, after a few days they ran out of wine. What do you think Jesus did? Help clean up and say goodnight? No! He told some folks to fill several large jars with water and he performed his first miracle by turning all that water into wine. So, Jesus' first miracle in John was not healing the sick, feeding the hungry, walking on water, or raising the dead. His first miracle was making about 180 gallons of wine so a party could continue!

The meaning of the miracle is not that Jesus is thrilled when we get intoxicated. It is about the extravagant joy and love Jesus came to bring us. You can read the story of Jesus turning the water into wine over and over again. You can send it to

scholars and theologians trying to find some great theological point, but you will never find it. The great truth of that story is this: sometimes Jesus did things for fun! Jesus was showing us how to get our joy back and for our joy to be full.

I think of it this way. When I was a little boy and would get grumpy and grouchy, my dad had a clever way of changing my mood. He would not lecture me. He wouldn't tell me that I should be grateful for what I had and not complain. He would get on the floor with me and find a place just above my belly button and blow air bubbles on my tummy. He would do it until I smiled and gave into laughter. Quite simply, this is what God did for us in Jesus. God got down on our level and embraced us so that we would find joy again.

So, you have homework to do. Join the youth for field day today and play. Go out and let yourself be loved. Go hack at a golf ball. Take dance lessons and learn how to dance. Turn on your favorite song and sing like no one is watching or listening. Watch Caddy Shack again for the 20th time and laugh your way to joy!

I came across a wonderful quote from an 85 year old woman from the hill country of Kentucky. I believe these words express what I am trying to communicate today:

If I had to live my life over again, I would dare to make more mistakes next time. I would relax. I would be sillier. I would take fewer things seriously...I would eat more ice cream and less beans. I would have more actual troubles but fewer imaginary ones. You see I am one of those people who lived seriously and sanely hour after hour, day after day. I've been one of those persons who never went anyplace without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, a raincoat, and a parachute. If I had to do it over again, I'd travel lighter.

What would you say if you had to finish this sentence: "If I had to live my life over, I would..."? Don't wait to experience God's joy in your life. Do it now! Learn to play again. Every moment is a gift. This is why we call it "the present." Enjoy God's enjoyment of you. Enjoy your life, have fun and play. When you do, you will be very close to the Kingdom of God. Amen.



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