**[1]** Holy Humor Sunday, April 27, 2025
Sermon Title: Backwards and Forwards Joy
Scripture: Psalm 118:24-29; Acts 4:5-12
Theme: You are invited to share your joy!  Bring a ‘clean’ joke to share during the
sermon time period.

**[2]** “Make my joy complete,” says Paul to the Philippian church, sharing the same mind, the same loving Spirit of compassion, the same humility shown by Jesus! (Phil. 2:2). For Paul, joy is a fruit of the spirit.  (Gal 5:22)   It is a symbol of the presence of God. Alexander Schmemann has called joy the “co-efficient of eternity”.   One meets God in joy.  Paul Tillich writes that “joy is deeper than suffering.  It is ultimate.  Eternal joy is not reached by living on the surface.  It is obtained by breaking through the surface, by looking for the deep things within ourselves.”

The Hebrew word for “joy” comes from a verb meaning “to be bright and glad”. Langdon Gilkey writes that “joy is the center of all our valuing”.   We cannot call it forth by will, however hard we try.  It comes to us suddenly and unevoked.  It is quite beyond our creation, control or determination.” The poet, Samuel Coleridge, writes that joy is the “strong music in the soul.”  “This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist, animates our cold world.   Hope is the power of joyfulness.” Frank Frost writes:  “A feast was not something accidental for early Christian people, it was a way of putting meaning into their lives, of liberating lives from the animal rhythms, it was not a break in his hard life of work—it was a justification of that work, the fruit of that work.”

Joke:
George Burns once said, “You can’t help getting older, but you can help getting old. Chronologically the clock is going to keep on ticking for all of us, but if we take a lick of humor, we can prevent a hardening of the attitudes. If we save humor, humor can be a lifesaver.”

Anselm of Canterbury ( 1033 - 1109 ) Proslogium

“For I have found a joy that is full, and more than full.  For when heart, and mind, and soul, and all the (human) are full of that joy,  joy beyond measure will still remain.  Hence, not all of that joy shall enter into those who rejoice; but they who rejoice shall wholly enter into that joy.”

**[3]** Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, believed that it is laughter that separates us from the animals, rather than speech.  He writes: “when a baby gives its first laugh, it is transformed into a human being, in a process known as “human en-souling.”   Just think of it, that God becoming Human, Immanuel, is parallel to God sharing the healing power of laughter with us.

Medical experts list four (4) ways that laughter provides healing:

* **Laughter relaxes the whole body.** A good, hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress, leaving your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes after.
* **Laughter boosts the immune system.** Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thus improving your resistance to disease.
* **Laughter triggers the release of endorphins,** the body’s natural feel-good chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain.
* **Laughter protects the heart.** Laughter improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, which can help protect you against a heart attack and other cardiovascular problems.

Joke:
Kevin and Ryan, ages five and three, were waiting for breakfast one Christmas morning.  As their mother was preparing some pancakes, the boys began to argue loudly over who would get the first one from the griddle.  Their mother saw an opportunity for a moral lesson.  “If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, ‘Let my brother have the first pancake.  I can wait.’  She explained.  Kevin immediately turned to his younger brother and said:  ‘Okay, Ryan.  You be Jesus!’

When it comes to laughter, we are all winners, even if we get the last pancake off the griddle! Just think about how quickly laughter spreads.   Joy is one of the most contagious emotions on earth.  What if our desire for salvation spread as quickly as our joy?   Think of it.  Why shouldn’t we think of salvation in just the same way.   Someone laughs, our brains begin to smile naturally in response, and before we know, we are laughing uncontrollably.   Someone testifies about how Jesus has changed their lives forever, our spirits begin to naturally respond with our own experience, and before we know it, we are also testifying.  The Holy Spirit is full of holy joy.
Isaiah 12:3

Shout and sing for joy.  For great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. With joy you shall draw water from the wells of salvation and wholeness. Give thanks to the Lord.

Joke:
A church was badly in need of a coat of paint.  So the pastor decided he would do the job himself.  All he had was one bucket of paint.   So he got a bunch of buckets and some water, and he thinned the paint enough to cover the entire church.  Then he spent all day painting.  That night it rained—very hard—and washed all the paint off.  The pastor was quite discouraged and asked God, ‘Why…why God, did you let it rain and wash of all my hard work?’   Then God responded:  ‘Repaint! Repaint! And thin no more!”
Let us, then, paint with a full brush of joy!

**[4]** The word joy occurs 164 times in a concordance of the Bible, and the word “rejoice” is repeated 191 times.   So, we know it is important because of its frequency.   But, just how important you might ask?   The Greek word for “Joy” is “Chara” and it is a first-cousin to the Greek word for “Grace” which is “Charis”.   In John 1:16, we read, “From his fullness, we have received grace upon grace.”  But, we could also read this as : “From his fullness, we have received joy upon joy.”   The Greek verb underlying the word “Agape”  or “Love” means “to be content, or have joy, with someone or something”.   Joy not only is related to Grace and Love, in **[5]** the Greek language, but it is also related to Hope and anticipation.   When the Apostle Paul uses the phrase “I rejoice greatly that…”, he is using what scholars call the “Joy formula” which expresses that he has received good news from the church to which he is writing and that he desires to receive further news from that church in the future.   The ancient philosopher, Philo, writes that “just as fear is grief before grief, hope is joy before joy.”  A frequent form of greeting in the New Testament is the Greek word “Chairo” which means “Joy to you” or “Good morning”.  It is a wish that you might “fare well” in the day ahead of you.

**[6]** Pope Francis, in his Encyclical entitled Joy of the Gospel from 2013, writes these words:
“Let us not flee from the resurrection”
The Lord does not disappoint, God will restore our joy.
Treat yourself well! (If you have access to the means to do so)
No one will take your joy from you
Enter into the great stream of joy; we are infinitely loved.
To engender joy leads to an enriching friendship
Christ is forever young, a source of newness
The Christian message never grows old

**[7]** Peter and John had been mediating on Psalm 118 on that extraordinary date of destiny, a day not to long after the resurrection. This psalm is the model prayer for those praying in the temple. The people renewed their confession using this Psalm: “The Lord is my strength and my might; The Lord has become my salvation!” The Psalm calls forth to open the gates of righteousness for those approaching to give thanks (Ps. 118:19).

But, on that day, no one could have anticipated how many would enter the gates. It all started
when Peter and John were making their way into the Jerusalem Temple at three o’clock in the afternoon. It was the traditional hour of prayer. After the Ascension, Luke tells us that the disciples returned to Jerusalem and engaged themselves in blessing God on a continual basis within the Temple (Lk. 24:52). We do not know his name, but a man who was lame from birth was carried into their pathway, just as they were approaching, and laid at the gate called ‘Beautiful,’ as was customary for him to ask assistance in this matter, so that he could ask for ‘alms’ (financial help, donations) from those, like Peter and John, who were entering the temple. He remains nameless to us, but those who frequented the temple to pray knew him; many had perhaps helped him in the past. Peter and John had no coins to give him, but they gave him something much better than help—they gave him a new life. They made his body whole and healthy again (‘perfect health’ – Acts 4:16). It was obvious to those passing through the gate that afternoon; he was leaping and jumping and walking around to check out his new mobility, to exercise his sea-legs as he began to get used to walking. The man they had healed was clinging to them for dear life as they made their way to Solomon’s Porch, their destination in the Temple, the very place where Jesus had taught so many times during his lifetime. People were staring at them. No doubt it felt odd to them to be in this position, but they were ready to jump into the circle of attention with both feet. “In Jesus there is resurrection of the dead,” they shouted out to everyone who could hear them. By faith in his name, you too can be made whole. Many took them at their word, some five thousand to be precise (4:4).  ‘Repent and turn to God so that your sins may be erased, so that the times of refreshing may come forth in Jesus’ name.’ And, so they did in massive numbers. Not an ordinary day at the Temple in Jerusalem! Over 5,000 attempting to go through the gate! Backward, then Forward! All of them singing Psalm 118 to the name of Jesus!
And so, the man who was healed, and thousands of others entered the gates that day. They entered through the name of Jesus, all made righteous in the blink of an eye, at a flash of the afternoon sun. They were all singing the Psalm, the Song, together ‘This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.’

Joke:

“A husband and wife were driving down a country lane on their way to visit some friends.  They came to a muddy patch in the road, and the car became bogged down.   After a few minutes of trying to get the car out by themselves, they saw a young farmer coming down the lane, driving some oxen before him.   He stopped when he saw the couple in trouble and offered to pull the car out of the mud for $50.   The husband accepted, and minutes later, the car was free.  The farmer turned to the husband and said, ‘You know, you’re the tenth car I’ve helped out of the mud today.’  The husband looks around at the fields, incredulously, and asks the farmer, ‘When do you have time to plough your land?  At night?’  ‘No,’ the young farmer replied, seriously.  ‘Night is when I put the water in the hole.’

Alleluia! Amen!