

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Luke 24:36b-48

³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

In his book, "Finding a Faith That Makes Sense," R. Scott Colglazier, wrote this thought-provoking story.

I recently saw a news report about an Army veteran named John Crabtree who had been receiving benefits from the government. Evidently he had been wounded in Vietnam and was now on permanent disability. One day, out of the blue, he received an official notification from the government of his own death. Needless to say, this was quite a shock!

Mr. Crabtree wrote the government a letter stating that he was indeed very much alive and would like to continue receiving his benefits. The letter did no good. He then tried calling the government. (Have you ever tried to call the government? This required the patience of Job and the persistence of Noah!) The phone calls didn't change the situation either. Finally, as a last resort, the veteran contacted a local television station, which ran a human-interest story about his situation.

During the interview, the reporter asked him, "How do you feel about this whole ordeal?" The veteran chuckled and said, "Well, I feel a little frustrated by it. After all, have you ever tried to prove that you're alive?"

That's a pretty good question for all of us. Could you prove that you are alive? Really, genuinely, deep-down alive? When was the last time you had an alive moment? Not the last time you took a breath or had your heartbeat inside your chest, but the last time you felt yourself alive to your living, alive to your loving, deeply present with the gift of life itself? When is the last time you felt overwhelming joy?

The feeling of joy surely makes us feel truly alive. Luke tells us about the disciples almost-disbelieving reaction of unimaginable joy when Jesus appeared to them. When Jesus died on that cruel cross, they had sealed away all their hopes and dreams in his lonely tomb. They probably remembered Jesus telling them about his death **and** resurrection, but they likely felt the chances of such a miracle happening were impossible.

As Jesus stood before them, the fear and denial that first captured the disciples' attention and stirred-in their minds and hearts, dissolved into unbelievable, unimaginable hope. Surely, they thought, "How can this be?" But then, as Jesus spoke to them, that tiny flicker of hope

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suddenly exploded into full-blown joy—joy that they were not expecting—but quickly spread within the disciples' hearts and consumed their whole beings. The miracle of Resurrection had happened, and the proof was standing right in front of them—Jesus—and he was eating fish. Jesus was alive! Wow!!! Can you imagine what that was like?

Can you think of a time when you felt joy such as this—a wow kind of joy? By its very nature, we don't expect to encounter such joyfulness on a regular basis. We do things to make ourselves happy, but full-blown joy—that usually comes as a surprise. Instead, we often get too busy with other stuff to do to even create an awareness of moments to capture our hearts. Other things in life may consume our attention. Stuff like our worries and stress distract us from finding joy from our life experiences. We can be pessimistic as we anticipate frustrations and pressure on a regular basis.

Did you know that the third Sunday of Easter, which happens to be today, is known as Jubilate Sunday, which means Joyous Sunday? This is the day on the Christian calendar which the church has set aside to allow itself to be surprised all over again by the joyous news of Jesus' resurrection.

Now, let's be honest with ourselves. When we consider all the possible places we might expect to find ourselves being surprised by joy—joy that seems almost too good to be true—is the church the first place we think of? Perhaps we hope to find joy at a family event, or when seeing an old friend, or when we go on a vacation to our favorite place. But, struggling to get ourselves awake and ready for Sunday morning church services may not be our first pick of potentially joyful moments in life.

And that is our own fault. Church should be the place where we expect to be shaken by the Holy Spirit and tickled to our toes by the power of the Good News of the gospel. But the church has allowed itself to become lifeless instead of stimulating, judgmentally academic instead of celebratory, well-thought-out instead of Spirit led.

As Christians, we feel obligated to spend all our time talking about all the serious details of what it means to be a good Christian, but where is the joy? Why aren't we talking about the joy of being a Christian? If Christians spent more time talking about the joy of being a Christian, following Jesus might spread like wildfire.

A prominent preacher used this illustration to emphasize this point. He "tells" of eating in a restaurant with another couple. There were some high-school students in a corner booth. The students got tickled about something and started laughing. Their laughter got louder and louder. Soon they became aware that some people were listening to their laughter, and they tried to stop. However, the more they tried to stop laughing, the more the giggles and laughter convulsed their entire bodies.

The preacher said that the entire booth was shaking with laughter and joy. Then something began to happen. The laughter moved out from that one booth to another. People started to smile, and then they, too, began to laugh.

Then the preacher said, "I saw it coming toward us! Soon we found ourselves caught up in the whole atmosphere of laughter and joy. We didn't even know what we were laughing about. But our conversation was interrupted as we smiled at each other and then broke out in laughter. It was an amazing moment."

The preacher continued, "Christian joy is far deeper and far more contagious."

Living out our faith, sharing Christ with others is a privilege and a Christian responsibility; **but we should also find joy in living for Him every day.** In Matthew 25, Jesus tells the parable of the loaned money. It is a story about a master who goes on a journey. The

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master divided his money among three of his servants according to their abilities. No one received more or less than he could manage. Two of the servants invested the money entrusted to them so that when the master returned, he was pleased to find they had made some money for him. The third servant was too afraid to do anything with the money given to him. He was afraid that if he lost money, his master would be upset with him and punish him.

The well-pleased master congratulates his two faithful servants by saying, "Well done. You have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master. This parable illustrates that being joyful is not some silly sentiment that serious Christians should disregard. Taking delight in life, all aspects of life, work and play, living life to the fullest until the very end of one's life is what God intends for people of faith.

R. Scott Colglazier, the one-time pastor of the largest Disciples of Christ church in the country, wrote in "Finding a Faith That Makes Sense," "Jesus, too, lived with wow! His wow revealed a Good-News God, not a bad-news God. His wow revealed a God ready to love, not ready to push away. His wow revealed a God who picks people up after they make mistakes, not a God who pushes people's noses down even further in those mistakes. The God of Jesus is a wow God of acceptance, not a woe God of fear. That's the wow of the essence of the Good News. Even the cruelty of a Roman cross couldn't stop the Jesus-Wow from filling the world. He wowed them even more by coming back to life through his resurrection, living through his disciples, and living even today as we feel his presence in our lives."

Do you remember that when Jesus arose from the waters after John the Baptist baptized him, God was heard to say, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased"; which in the Greek means, this is my beloved Son who brings me great pleasure. Jesus delighted his Father and gave Him great pleasure by his faithfulness.

Likewise, you and I were created to experience God's pleasure and to bring God great pleasure. So why is it that so many Christians have a hard time recognizing or showing the explosive joy contained in the Good News we are supposed to share with the world?

A man was being tailgated by a stressed-out woman on a busy boulevard. Suddenly, the light turned yellow, just in front of him. He did the right thing, stopping at the crosswalk, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection.

The tailgating woman was furious and honked her horn, screaming in frustration as she missed her chance to get through the intersection, dropping her cell phone and makeup.

As she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer ordered her to exit her car with her hands up. He took her to the police station where she was searched, fingerprinted, photographed, and placed in a holding cell. After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell and opened the door. She was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects.

He said, "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping off the guy in front of you, and cussing a blue streak at him. I noticed the 'What Would Jesus Do' bumper sticker, the 'Choose Life' license plate holder, the 'Follow Me to Sunday-School' bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk, Naturally, I assumed you had stolen the car."

We were created to bring God pleasure, to find pleasure in life and to bring pleasure to each other. Starting on this Jubilatae Sunday, why don't we renew our commitment to creating some joy, some wow, some pleasure among our faith community, within a culture around us that

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does not expect joy in their lives, especially not if they would become a Christian. Let's create some wow to testify to the joy of being a Christian.

One day, you and I will stand before God. We will hear from God either one of two sets of words. The worst thing you can hear is, "Depart from me. I take no pleasure in you."

The most wonderful thing you and I can hear are these words, words that will ring eternally: "Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have brought me great pleasure." Amen.