

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

Worship Service from April 11, 2021

Bright Sunday



**Welcome** Welcome to our Bright Sunday worship. Bright Sunday honors the spreading news and joy of Jesus' resurrection. It is celebrated with humor and happiness, so our pre-service music will help shape that lighter tone...

## **Pre-service Music**

**Music # 89** *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*

**Call to Worship** (R1 - Reader 1, R2 - Reader 2)

R1: The hymnwriter and the Bible both say all of nature silently speaks and reveals God's glory. I mentioned a few weeks back one of my favorite spots as a child was peering at the stars through the branches of a willow tree; in other periods of my life, it was walking through quiet sub-divisions at night, and sitting on the beach in the afternoon, watching and listening to the hypnotic pulses of the waves.

R2: The Lord has supplied us with an abundance of everything for life, and desires that we serve him joyfully and gladly, following all his ways. For his ways are the way to abundant life, and by working against his ways, we can complicate and add difficulty to our lives and spirits.

R1: The confusion and challenges can lead to miserable hearts and crushed spirits that leave us bone-tired weary. But there is hope to those living under the weight of these burdens. Weeping may linger for a night, but it will give way to days of laughter.

R2: His faithful people will thankfully sing their hearts out to the Lord. Cheerful hearts fill the day with festival songs. Therefore, follow his ways and always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances. This is God's will.

R1: Rejoice because the Lord is with us. Do not be overwhelmed by anything. Instead, bring every circumstance to the Lord in prayer, and present your petitions to God with thanksgiving for his ear, his presence, and his willingness to walk with you through every situation.

R2: And God's immeasurable, boundless peace will protect your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. *So in this next moment of silence*, reflect on your ways -- are they your ways that drain and darken, or are they his ways -- that fill and lighten?

Readings inspired by Psalm 19:11-4a, Romans 1:20, John 10:10, Deuteronomy 28:45-48, Proverbs 15:15, 17:22, Luke 6:21b, Psalm 30:4-5, 1 Thessalonians 5:15b-18, Philippians 4:4-9)

## Silence

### Prayer Music *Seek Ye First*

**Assurance/Prayers** I invite you to close your eyes and breathe deeply and slowly. Allow your body and spirit to settle into a comfortable peace. Earlier, I mentioned some of my favorite places for finding peace and inspiration. Maybe one of those works for you -- maybe some other settings -- the colors of fall, the rebirth of spring, or remember a place or time that you experienced a warmth and peaceful closeness to God..... Let that peace fill you again now.... The verses we just sang precede and follow Jesus' words about the flowers of the field, here today and gone tomorrow, yet look how God clothes them in beauty. And about the birds that don't sow or reap or store -- and yet God cares for them -- and yet we are so much more valuable.....



Therefore, Lord, you tell us not worry, that it will not extend our lives. Yet sometimes, we let our proper cares and concerns and planning for ourselves and for others get away from us and it clouds and darkens our hearts and minds, so that we become overly anxious and paralyzed in fear.

The Psalmist reminds us to reach out to you, to request that you create in us a heart cleansed from the cobwebs of sin and distraction, that you put right spirit within us -- a spirit that restores the joy of our salvation and sustains within us a desire to keep living for you no matter what our circumstances may be. To realize that whatever we face is temporary, that yes, we will weep and wail and mourn, but in your time, you will clothe us with a new season of joy and laughter and dancing, and our singing will no longer be silent. And so armed with the knowledge of your never-ending love and care, confident in our future hopes in you, we lift our joyful voices, and ask that you melt the clouds of sin and sadness, and drive the dark of doubt away, and fill us with the light of your presence -- and especially today we ask that you be with

- \* Jennifer DeHanke who will be having surgery on the 12th.
- \* Sheila Daniel's Fbook friend Sheryl Lanouette -- with cancer
- \* Lisa Weaver's mom Gloria who is 90 - diagnosed with heart failure
- \* Bill Wycoff's friend John Cole -- brain surgery
- \* Pat Harton's brother Davis Volink - hospitalized with apparent heart attack and broken vertebrae
- \* Mike Kenel who will be having treatment and surgery in the next couple months.

For any others that may not be mentioned out loud but are in our hearts and minds. And Lord, as we care for others, help us live this “clown ministry prayer” which contains good aspirations for us all... Lord, as I stumble through this life, help me to create more laughter than tears, dispense more happiness than gloom, spread more cheer than despair. Never let me become so indifferent that I will fail to see the wonder in the eyes of a child or the twinkle in the eyes of the aged. Never let me forget that my total effort is to cheer people, make them happy, and forget, at least for the moment, the unpleasant things in their lives. And... let us hear you whisper: “When you made my people smile, you made me smile.”

[Parts of this prayer were inspired by from Matthew 6:25-34, 7:7-9, Psalms (51,30) and “The Clown’s Prayer” of Smiles Unlimited, a Indianapolis clown ministry in hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons.]

So teach us again, in our daily lives, how to live out the prayer Jesus taught us to pray --- **Lord’s Prayer**

### **Special Instrumental Music *Habanera***

#### **Theme**

Ecclesiastes says there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, to mourn and to dance. Bright Sunday is about celebrating good news with healthy humor. I have a radio station on my phone that allows me to choose my own kind of music or talk, and if you don’t like a particular song, you can eliminate it. I loaded up a play list of short talking bits with a handful of stand-up comedians that generally avoided bad language and inappropriate jokes because humor helps me make it through the day. Recently, this radio station began adding to my comedy playlist others that they think I might enjoy, and that is fine because I’m willing to try new things. But I found that many that they added exceeded my personal appropriate zone and I will have to delete them back off my list.

I’ve noticed that our culture gets easily confused over what is good healthy humor and when is the proper time to use it. Just because other people may laugh does not necessarily make it funny or healthy. Everyone may draw that line a bit differently, but here are clues I use as to what I consider unhealthy and healthy humor. It is not good humor:

- 1) When it makes someone feel bad. The soldiers joked about Jesus on the cross -- and they laughed. But their kind of humor was cruel and mean. It is easy to pick on someone else about almost anything. But just because it is easy and we can get laughs does not make it good humor.

- 2) Another time humor is not healthy it when we use it to avoid things. If a spouse or parent or close friend or Sunday School/Bible Study teacher or group leader is trying to teach you something important, and they are interrupted by one joke after another to distract the attention from the important lesson to your jokes -- then that is not good humor. Not that we can't have a good time with those people or groups, -- but when it frustrates the teacher or parent -- then we've gone too far...
- 3) We use it to deny things. If we do something wrong, that is not something to laugh off as if it were nothing.

On the other hand -- when used right -- humor can be very helpful.

- 1) It is an healthy response to the innocent quirks that we all have. If we all took ourselves and life too seriously, it would make us crazy. Laughter helps us tolerate ourselves and others.
- 2) Humor can help us balance two truths -- that the world and people do not revolve around us -- we aren't the center of the Universe. But on the other hand, we are honorably and wonderfully made by God and very special and important people.
- 3) Healthy laughter of good-hearted joy is physically good for your bodies. I won't go into the science, I'll just tell you that it is good for you.
- 4) Good humor can help us cope with difficult things. Laughing can help you feel better when things are sad or bad. (But be careful because badly timed or wrongly used will make it worse).
- 5) Humor is a way of celebrating new life and celebrating the goodness that is all around us.
- 6) My rule of thumb for humor: If you are thinking of doing or saying something funny -- put yourself on the other end of it. If it were said or done to you, would you laugh and enjoy it? or be frightened or hurt and offended, or make you feel ignored and frustrated? And if you have are one of those people who has a really thick skin, who can take a lot; you might have to think a little harder about people who may be more easily hurt than yourself. (For example, some people may love it when pranks are done to them, but that doesn't mean it is alright to pull pranks on others, because not all people enjoy pranks. But if it makes *everyone* feel like laughing, or with my type of humor, it is usually *groaning* -- then it might be good, or at least acceptable humor.

A junior high English teacher attended the same church as one family who had a student in her class. She had asked the class to write a one sentence statement of their goal for the year. The following Sunday the teacher and excitedly went to

the student's mother to tell her that her son had written "My goal for the year is to grow in spirit". The mom was bursting with pride and when they got home, she talked to her son about it. He said, "She misread it. I didn't say grow in spirit, I said to get my growing spurt." But growing in spirit is a really cool goal isn't it, and maybe a healthy sense of humor can help -- because we serve a Son of God who was the Word from the beginning, one with the father, whose glory is seen in creation but even more in Jesus. What a beautiful, wonderful, powerful name it is, the name of Jesus who came down from heaven, whose love was greater than our sin; so that there is now nothing powerful enough to separate us from him. That is the meaning of some of the lyrics from the song Paul is going play for us now -- *What a Beautiful Name It Is*.

### **Special Instrumental Music**    *What a Beautiful Name*

#### **Bible Reading**    **1 Peter 1:3-6, 8-9**

Peter too, tells us how beautiful is the name, the life of Jesus; and what hope, what firm confidence he brings. He brings it to us because death could not hold him. The power of sin -- the barrier between God and humanity -- is ripped in two. He defeated its consequences of sin and that grave by being raised to life again. No rival can compare or compete with God's eternal kingdom, and glory, for his is the name above every name. And Peter writes that we are granted an inheritance for the life to come, but even now, in the midst of difficult days, we can be filled with an indescribable joy. Listen to how Peter puts it:

What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have him, this Father of our Master Jesus! Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future starts now! God is keeping careful watch over us and the future. The Day is coming when you'll have it all—life healed and whole. (MSG) In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials....(NIV) You never saw him, yet you love him. You still don't see him, yet you trust him—with laughter and singing (MSG) --- with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (NIV)

Let's sing about our assurance of our heavenly inheritance that begins even now.

### **Music**    *Blessed Assurance*

## **Sermon**    *Healing Humor*

I hope it is the story of all of us -- perfect delight, happy and blest, whispers of love that we can get lost in -- in even the worst of days. In a Children's time, a pastor was talking about the worst of days for Jonah, the reluctant missionary to the Ninevites, thrown overboard during a sea storm, swallowed by a great fish and after Jonah prayed, the beast vomited him up on shore. The pastor asked "What do we learn from this story for today?" And one child raised his hand and answered -- "It proves that even a fish can't stomach a bad preacher."

Samuel Shoemaker warned against "professional pulpit jokers" but he also said that "a Christian faith without humor is a blight.". It is almost impossible to keep humor and joy out of faith, but through the ages, in some places, we have sure tried. A small child was turning around in his pew and smiling at everyone. No noise, just smiling. Suddenly the mother jerked him around and in a stage whisper that everyone heard, said "Stop grinning! You are in church!" and she pushed him down into the pew and as tears rolled down his cheeks she said, "That's better."

An impatient boy in Sunday School blurted out, "Hurry up, this is boring." The girl sitting beside him scolded, "Be quiet, it is supposed to be boring."

Someone reasoned with me a long time ago "It is good for a church to be boring because someday a child is going to get a boring teacher and they will have to learn how to listen." The church has a lot of missions and visions and roles and secondary purposes, but until then I had never envisioned it as "preparing its children to handle boring teachers at school".

I donated posters to one church which shows Jesus from the shoulders up, a great big smile of his face, the rigging from the fishing nets behind him, and he had suppld a great big catch of fish for his disciples... and a great big smile on his face because of the gift he had given them, he enjoyed doing that for them so much.

And one of the leaders in that church, who really was a positive thinker and had a great sense of humor and enjoyed his life of faith -- admitted that he had trouble getting used to seeing Jesus that way. I understand. Religious artistry inundates us with Jesus agonizing in the garden, angrily cleansing the temple, feeling forsaken on the cross, and even when the children came running to him, he was often portrayed as grim and somber. I don't know many kids who run to someone who is like that. It was as if they were running to get punished!

We tend to equate bright and light and humor and laughter with frivolous and insignificant. And we are dealing with heaven and hell, life and death, and a whole

way of living life and shaping at least church culture if not the whole wider culture. This is really important, serious stuff. But then we equate important and serious with somber and grouchy. So to express the hilarious-beyond-belief-kind-of- joy because death has been turned to life and sorrow into joy -- well let's just say that for most of us, it is not one of the most familiar or well accomplished expressions of our faith.

John Wesley organized people with such structure and special rules that they were derisively labeled Methodists for their methodical approach to faith, notoriously methodical, if you read that history. Some got the impression that he didn't have a smiling bone in his body much less a funny bone, and I get that impression too as I read about him. He replied in a letter to one such critic:

“You seem to apprehend that I believe religion to be inconsistent with cheerfulness, sociability, friendliness, or a good attitude. Far from it. I am convinced that true religion or holiness cannot be obtained without cheerfulness. In fact, without holiness or true religion, cheerfulness cannot be maintained for any length of time. True religion has nothing sour, austere, unsociable, or unfriendly about it. Are you for having as much cheerfulness as you can? So am I.”

Meanwhile, others in his day were using contemporary tunes from popular operas, dance music, and folk songs to create the hymnody of the church. In spite of its reputation, infectious joy is a part of the church. It was infectious joy that led the Pharisees to accuse Jesus of being a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. (Luke 7:32-35) It was this kind of powerful joy that led the astonished people to think the Apostles were drunk instead of praying (Acts 2:13). The first Franciscan monks were criticized for laughing in church, the Reformed Carmelite convents, despite strict disciplines, were happy places because St. Teresa insisted on music and a jolly time during recreation hours.

Many think Bright Sunday (sometimes called Holy Humor Sunday and a variety of other names) but derived from the tradition of Easter Monday may have begun back in the 5th century when Bishop John Chrysostom preached that Easter was a cosmic joke that God played on Satan and death by raising Jesus from the dead.

The somber solemnness of Jesus' passion culminates with the stunning joy of his resurrection and it is this joy that is the turning point in history -- so why would we not celebrate God's joke on evil by telling jokes (healthy jokes) and funny stories, feasting, and enjoying good laughs and looking forward to that banquet / reception (that wedding reception) that Jesus has waiting for us?

Maybe the reason some people have lost joy is that they have lost their hope. Rev. Karl Kraft shares (tongue in cheek --- I'm not sure they are all *that* funny or not) some indicators that it might be time for the church to rediscover this living hope...

- When comments about the preacher's hairstyle outnumber the comments about the sermon.
- When printed liturgy includes a phone number with the words "Pizza Delivery".
- When PowerPoint has running ribbon along the bottom of the screen with updated sports scores.
- When the pastor takes weekends off.
- When the Finance Committee announces that stewardship letters are in the narthex, and they are organized in *apathetical* order.

The church calendar tells us we are in a season of joyful days. One of the good things about following the seasons of the church is that it teaches us how to live and sing our faith in all different kinds of seasons of life. Without the seasons we could live in denial, (like many people who give up Lent for Lent now -- they don't want to deal with that) but the church teaches us how to deal with that side of life when we go through those seasons. Without the seasons, we could spend too much time being victims instead of victors, blamers instead of becomers, coping instead of changing, existing instead of excelling, protecting ourselves instead of trying to perfect ourselves in grace. By going through the seasons, we learn how to experience God and faithfully live out our faith when we are glad as well as when we are sad, and every circumstance in-between.

On the other hand, one of the challenges of following the seasons of the church is that the church's calendar of seasons doesn't always line up with our personal season of life. We could be doing great while the church is observing Good Friday, or the church could be celebrating Easter joy when we are personally experiencing days of passion.

Psalm 126 reflects a season of rejoicing - written when Israel returned from exile in the days of Nehemiah. The Psalmist wrote: "... we were like people who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy, and all the people said, "The Lord has done great things for them!"

He has, and we should enjoy our joy. Almost always, in church, especially in the sanctuary, when I use humor it's purpose is to make a point. But sometimes, one day a year, humor is just for the sake of teaching us that "humor is okay."



[congregation] So, here is a “knock-knock” joke. You know knock-knock jokes, right? [Yes.] Okay, you start... [knock knock] “Who’s there?” [Silence]. Here’s one more. ‘Knock knock” [Who’s there?] “Little ol’ lady” [“Little ol’ lady who?”] I didn’t know you could yodel!”

(Sometimes humor’s only point is to spread joy. Here are some more --)

- Q: Why did the Chicken cross the playground? A: To get to the other *slide!*
- Q: What do you call a pig that knows karate? A: A pork chop.
- Q: Why do bees have sticky hair? A: They use honey-combs.
- Q: What does a robot frog say? A: Ri--BOT.
- Q: How do you make a tissue dance? A: You put a little boogie in it.
- (Write these down for your grandkids, right?)
- Q: Why do cows wear bells? A: Their horns do not work.
- Q: How did the barber win the race? A: He knew a short cut.
- Q: Where do library books like to sleep? A: Under their covers.
- Q: Why can’t a bicycle stand up by itself? A: It is two (too) tired.
- (See I got some groans for that one too).
- Q: Why did the pastor run around the bed? A: He was trying to catch up on his sleep

We rejoice with those who rejoice. The Bible tells us also in that same sentence that we mourn with those who mourn -- (Romans 12:15) For those going through a darker season -- do not be discouraged. Hear Jesus tell us, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they *shall* be comforted” (Matthew 5:4) and in the sermon on the Plain -- “Blessed are you who weep, for you *will* laugh.” (Luke 6:21) Take courage, like snow in spring -- we may never know when -- but a season of renewal and restoration and resurrection and rejoicing is coming.

Peter says this resurrection, this renewed restored living hope is based on God’s promises of protecting us like a powerful shield, and the promise of giving us everything we need to reach our home in heaven -- God is so powerful and so in control that *everything* that comes our way, from whatever source it comes, he can transform it into a tool that perfects our faith, which is greater than riches, and which leads to a fulfillment of our goal -- the salvation of our souls, and an overflowing joy that defies explanation of expression. As one hymn puts it -- His grace is all complete, He supplies every need... [a] hope so bright and clear, the Savior’s presence is so near, I can see his smiling face. It is joy unspeakable and full of glory, and the half has never yet been told.

His name was Paul. He lived in a small town in the Pacific Northwest some years ago (many years ago now). He was just a little boy when his family became the proud owners of one of the first telephones in the neighborhood (that hints at how long ago). It was one of those wooden boxes attached to the wall, with the shiny receiver hanging on the side of the box and the mouthpiece attached to the front.

Young Paul listened with fascination as his mother and father used the phone, and he discovered that somewhere inside the wonderful device called a telephone lived an amazing person. Her name was "Information Please", and there was nothing she did not know. "Information Please" could supply anybody's number, as well as the correct time.

Paul's first experience with "Information Please" came one day when he was home alone and he whacked his finger with a hammer. The pain was terrible, and he didn't know what to do. And then he thought of the telephone. He pulled a footstool up to the phone, climbed up, unhooked the receiver, held it to his ear, and said, "Information please" into the mouthpiece. There was a click or two and then a small clear voice spoke:

"Information." "I hurt my finger!" he wailed into the phone. "Isn't your mother home?"

"Nobody is home but me." "Are you bleeding?" "No. I hit my finger with a hammer and it hurts." "Can you open your icebox?" "Yes." "The go get some ice and hold it to your finger." Paul did this and it helped a lot.

After that, Paul called "Information Please" for everything. She helped him with geography and his math. She taught him how to spell the word "fix". She told him what to feed his pet chipmunk. And when Paul's pet canary died, she tenderly listened to his grieving and said, "Paul, remember that there are always other worlds to sing in." Somehow that helped and he felt better.

When Paul was nine, he moved with his family to Boston, and as the years passed he missed "Information Please" very much. Years later, Paul headed out west to college. His plane landed in Seattle. He dialed his hometown operator and said,

"Information Please". Miraculously, he heard that same, small, dear voice that he knew so well. "Information."

Paul hadn't planned it, but he suddenly blurted out, "Could you tell me how to spell the word "fix"?". There was a long pause. Then a soft answer, "I guess your finger must be all healed by now."

\ He laughed. "So it's really still you! Do you have any idea how much you meant to me during that time when I was a little boy?"

"I wonder if you now how much your calls meant to me." she answered. "I never had any children, and I used to look forward to your calls so much."

They reminisced and he asked if he could call her again when he was back in the area. She said "Please do, just ask for Sally." Three months later, Paul was back in Seattle. He called, but a different voice answered. He asked for Sally. "Are you a friend?" the operator asked. "Yes, I'm Paul, a very old friend."

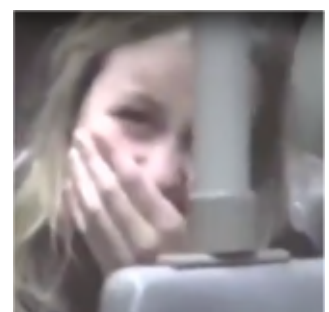
"I'm sorry to have to tell you this," she said. "Sally had been working part time the last few years because she was very sick. She passed away 5 weeks ago." Before Paul could hang up, the operator said, "Wait, did you say your name was Paul?"

"Yes."

"Sally left a message for you. She wrote it down in case you called. Let me read it to you. "When Paul calls, tell him that I still say "There are other worlds to sing in. He will know what it means." Paul thanked her and hung up, and he did know what she meant. "There are other worlds to sing in."

God provides us with everything we need for that world -- why shouldn't we be happy? God provides us everything we truly need for this world -- why aren't we overflowing with hilarious joy? And one way to experience the joy of our salvation more is to share that joy with others. Experience the joy of our salvation through healthy, healing, humor, not the kind that is at the expense of another -- but helps others to become happier too. Now that I've got many of you crying, we're going to turn the mood table back again and watch a video on just how contagious joy can be...

[Video is play of a person who enters a subway car (just below) and plays something to himself on his tablet, laughing freely and loudly. Soon most of the previously sedate car is laughing with him even though they have no idea why he is laughing.] At the end were these words: "Happiness starts with a smile, what are we waiting for?"



**Prayer (Reader, People)**

Let's pray responsively. Join me on the bold font. Lord, we thank you for the joy you give us by your presence. Help us to share your joy by using humor to make others better. Creating Father, you made us in your image.

**We live, we love, we laugh, because we are like you.**

The living Christ, our Lord and Savior.

**Jesus had the last laugh on the devil when He rose from the dead.**

And the Holy Spirit, who fills our life.

**Our counselor, our guide, our motivator - He is our joy!**

Forgive us, Lord, when we take ourselves too seriously, when we don't claim the happiness that is rightfully ours as your children.

**Restore to us the joy of our salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

**Music Intro** It is why Jesus came to earth, that we have a full life and can live in God's love, and his joy can be in us and be complete -- because he is risen...

**Music*****Joy to the World, the Lord's Alive***

*(To tune of Joy to the World)*

Joy to the World, the Lord's alive,  
Awake, rejoice and sing!  
It's just as He had said,  
He's risen from the dead.

Salvation now He brings,  
Salvation now He brings,  
Salvation, salvation now He brings.

Joy to the World, the empty tomb,  
Proclaims a victory.  
Of light compelling,  
A great dispelling

Of darkness in the world,  
Of darkness in the world,  
Of darkness, of darkness in the world.

Joy to the World,  
Our Savior reigns,  
Let Heaven and earth proclaim  
The glories of His righteousness,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders, wonders of His love.

**Blessing**

Now may our God of all hope fill you up with joy and peace as you trust him, so that as you trust him, the Holy Spirit's life-giving energy will make you overflow with hope so that you can reach out and welcome others to God's joy, that together, we will experience lives which are not only rich, full, and passionate, but also filled with happiness.... **Amen.**