

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from September 26, 2021



Music Joyful, Joyful

Music (vv 1,2,3,4) There's Within My Heart a Melody

Responsive Reading (LR = Lay Reader C = Congregation)

LR: Rejoice in the Lord always. Celebrate God all day, every day. Revel in him!

C: We will always be full of joy because we belong to the Lord.

LR: Yes! Look how God has made all his devoted lovers flourish like palm trees. Each one growing in victory and standing with strength!

C: He transplants us into his heavenly courtyard, where we thrive in his presence.

LR: Even in old age they will stay fresh, bearing luscious fruit and abiding faithfully. Listen to them continue to proclaim with pleasure:

C: "God, you are so good! You are our beautiful strength!"

LR: You will stand firm like a flourishing tree planted by God's design, deeply rooted by the brooks of bliss, bearing fruit in every season of life. Never dry, never fainting, ever blessed, ever prosperous.

C: If the roots of a tree are holy and set apart for God, so too will be the branches.

LR: God grafted you branches in -- attached by faith -- in order to share in the wonderful richness of the cultivated vine. But don't let that make you feel superior others. Instead, stand in awe and reverence.

C: For we don't support the root - we owe our lives to the Root that supports us!

LR: Therefore, since the Spirit is our source of life, let us keep living in the Spirit by keeping in step with him and following his leading as he directs every aspect of our lives.

C: The fruit of the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy...

(Inspired from Philippians 4:4. Psalms 92:12-15a, 1:3.
Romans 11:16b-18, Galatians 5:25,22 (MSG, TPT, NLT, NIV))

Theme And today we share the joy. Once upon a time in a land far away there was the sound of a cheerful trumpet that could be heard everywhere every day. Its tunes were so happy and peppy that everyone was inspired to live happy joyful lives.

Then one day the trumpet didn't sound. Then the next, and the next. Over time, everyone began to feel sad. But no one did anything about it --- except for a little girl. She went throughout the land asking everyone everywhere. "What happened to the trumpet? What happened to the music?"

Someone directed her to a wise man in the mountains who knew pretty much everything that happens in the area. She went and asked him about the happy trumpet. He replied, "The trumpet got caught in the well of dark shadows, and was so sad it could no longer play, and with each passing day it descended deeper into the well. The girl asked directions. He gave them to her and wished her a successful journey. He also handed her a guitar saying she might find it useful at a critical time.

When she arrived at the well of dark shadows, she found it surrounded by musicians. They were mourning the loss of the trumpet by playing sorrowful, sad tunes. She took out the guitar and played with them for a while. As they played, she began to realize that while this music is appropriate and important to experience at times, she also realized that a depressed trumpet in the well of shadows would never be inspired to leave that sadness with that kind of music. She encouraged the musicians to join her in the cheeriest, happiest songs. It wasn't too long before the atmosphere surrounding the well began to lift and its energy penetrated into the depths. In time, the spirits of the trumpet and some other sad instruments that had lost their way in the gloom began to lift and they came out of the well, more joyful than ever and they again began to inspire people to happy and joyful lives.

The girl learned how important it is to offer joy to others; and so, from that day on they shared their joy as much as they could with their smiles and with their music.

(Adapted from *The Happy Trumpet*) by Pedro Pablo Sacristán)

Two simple examples: If you look in the front of the hymnal, you'll see John Wesley's rules of singing in which he warns (and I'll put it in a mild form) against singing the cheerful upbeat songs as if they were not. (The United Methodist Hymnal, p vii) Example two: I know one family who had roots in Hawaii and every July 4th they would host a luau for family and friends. There were all kinds of foods

and games. It was a fun and joyful time for them because they were able to share their home and their food and themselves with others. The Bible too, calls us to commemorate. In a vernacular way of saying Psalm 118:24, By saving me, the Lord has acted and made my day, we will rejoice and celebrate in it. (adapted AMP, CEB)

Music This is the Day (2x)

Music # 2145 (vv 1,3,2) I've Got Peace Like a River

Prayers Gracious God, we thank you for your peace, for your love, your joy, for making our days; we do thank you and celebrate your many actions and blessings on our behalf. Even with all of what seems like struggles to us, we do celebrate who we are and where we live, and how you watch over us. We are thankful for the blessing of material things, for family and friends, for this nation. We humble ourselves, asking for wisdom to use wisely the freedom we have been granted. You have given us minds for thinking, hearts for feeling, and souls for connecting with you. You have given us all things.

May we never all this and more for granted, for we see places all over the world, where worshipping you and expressing beliefs is greeted with serious opposition, forced poverty, prison, and worse. Exercising their faith strips them of all their freedoms.

May we always be a people who remember and work for loving grace and merciful justice as you have done for us and would have us do for others. We praise you with joy, loving God, for your grace is better than life itself. You sustain us through the shadows of deep darkness, and you save us with your life each new day. In the shadow of your wings, we sing for joy and bless your holy name.

Intercession We rejoice and thank you for those who are doing well and pray for those who are hurting in any way. We especially remember troubled peoples and nations, such as Afghanistan, for people struggling with covid, for Kathy, for the F/F Lisa Weaver's mother, Gloria Stone, who passed away last week, and now her brother-in-law J R Newcome, who has been hospitalized with serious medical problems. We also lift up Jamie and Danny, both hospitalized with covid, she is responding, and at last report, he is not doing as well, for Jim Mallot who is beginning physical therapy, watch over the Kirkpatricks as they travel to Finland, and Debbie Kirkpatrick's sister Penny who is awaiting test results. **Quilt** and finally, we remember Susan Woodworth who has breast cancer and for whom we

now dedicate this quilt. Lord, we ask from you a special blessing on this quilt and on Susan Woodworth for whom it will be given. We pray that your strong, loving arms will hold her up in faith and give her endurance for the challenging journey that lay ahead.

As she wraps this quilt around her in quiet times, may your reigning peace calm her spirit and allow her to feel the comfort of the love and prayers this church. Even in the darkest of nights, remind her that you are there, always awake, keeping watch, holding her close, sharing her innermost thoughts, reminding her that she is never alone. We pray this for Susan Woodworth in the name of the One who endures with us, beside us, through all our sorrows and is with us in all of our joys.

We are all reassured of your presence and provision and protection in the prayer you taught us to pray... **Lord's Prayer**

While the summer singers come forward, let me tell you a bit about the author, Barney Elliot, a NY native raised in Michigan and buried in OH where he also lived many years. He accepted Christ in a revival meeting in Bangor, MI; that is about a ½ hour west of Kalamazoo. A couple years after that, he sang bass in a Christian singing group... He eventually became a pastor and produced books, hymnals and wrote many (1000s) of hymns, most of which are not really known today, but some still are including the one we are about to sing.

This particular song was inspired by 1 Peter. We'll hear about that after the song. In commenting on this song, Robert Cottrill wrote that, "Though God's blessings are often beyond description, it's in praising Him for what we are able to comprehend that our souls are strengthened and encouraged. That seems to be the meaning of Nehemiah when he told the people of Israel, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." (Nehemiah 8:10).

Special Music Summer Singers Joy Unspeakable

Bible Reading Introduction and Reading John 15:1-5, 8-11

Intro That song was inspired by 1 Peter 1:3 and following, which says that God graciously gave us new life and a living hope by raising Jesus, and that we will receive a blessed inheritance that is being kept safe for us in heaven... In this we can greatly rejoice even if we are experiencing troubles now...troubles that can refine and purify and strengthen our faith... For even though we have not seen Christ, we love him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for we are receiving the goal of our faith -- our salvation. Our first reading told us that we were

graciously included and supported so that we can flourish in this faith, and now Jesus elaborates on how to fully experience his joy within us...

^{15:1} “I am the real vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²Every branch which is part of me but fails to bear fruit, he cuts off; and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes, so that it may bear more fruit. ³Right now, because of the word which I have spoken to you, you are pruned. ⁴Stay united with me, as I will with you — for just as the branch can’t put forth fruit by itself apart from the vine, so you can’t bear fruit apart from me. ⁵“I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who stay united with me, and I with them, are the ones who bear much fruit; because apart from me you can’t do a thing...

⁸This is how my Father is glorified — in your bearing much fruit; this is how you will prove to be my [disciples]. ⁹“Just as my Father has loved me, I too have loved you; so stay in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will stay in my love — just as I have kept my Father’s commands and stay in his love. ¹¹I have said this to you so that my joy may be in you, and your joy be complete. (CJB)

Music (vv 2,3) More Love to Thee, O Christ

Sermon “Releasing the Power of the Joy”

I didn’t have a chance to look it up, but it makes me wonder what sorrow, grief, and pain our song’s author faithfully went through that enabled her to call them sweet messengers that created within her more love for Christ. The point is that while God may not cause negative things to happen, he does gift us with the Spirit who helps us discover that there is victory in or in spite of every circumstance, and we who love God know that he has the potential to re-purpose every pain toward some redeeming good for us or for others, IF we cooperate with the leadership of God’s work in and around us. (Romans 8:28)

The lesson of (proper) pain

There is a positive purpose for pain. I have arrived at that age where I have started to become like Old MacDonald -- experiencing pains here and there and everywhere -- here a grunt, there a grunt, everywhere a grunt grunt -- and often for no obviously identifiable cause or reason. Pain is not pleasant, and instinctively it causes me to move differently to help prevent or minimize that pain, (built into our body’s system) so that hopefully we won’t use it and aggravate it more, so my body will be nurtured by its rest because we avoid those kind of movements and that area can heal and return to normal. If I did not feel the pain, my body wouldn’t react, and it wouldn’t teach me to limp or do something different to avoid those

motions that put strain on the injured part and perhaps cause even more damage. Pain protects us by informing us that something is wrong and needs to be taken care of.

An extreme example. If I absent-mindedly put my hand on a stove top's active gas burner, pain tells me to take action and do it quickly, right? Without pain, who knows how much damage may be done before I realize that what I am hurting myself! It is a wonderful design God has built into our system! And not just for physical pain, but also, for examples:

Emotional pain: A parent disciplines a child for a bad action or inaction. The child feels bad and that encourages him or her to not repeat the same mistake to avoid the shame and sadness that it causes.

Relational pain: Two people have a fight. The pain urges us to take action and seek peace with each other, or if that isn't possible, to take steps to work through our loss.

Social pain: We hear tragic news. Moved by our empathetic, or at least sympathetic pain, we send money or take up a cause to alleviate the suffering of those effected.

Spiritual pain: Our conscience (Hebrews 9:14), or better, God's Spirit within us (John 16:8-13) may indicate through pain or yearning that something is wrong that needs to be addressed. As a result, we search for God, we seek his forgiveness, and/or take steps to fix whatever is causing that unrest and craving for peace (that's how our hymnwriter put it).

Our sinful nature has partially broken down the proper function of our pain system. We may have phantom pains that don't mean anything. We experience false guilt, we are not guilty, but we feel that way. We drive ourselves to misery with lies about our self-worth. This brokenness complicates our life's pain and repair system that attempts to restore us to health and happiness. But we're going to keep it simple today. Let's set aside these dysfunctions and limit our application to when our pain and recovery system is working properly.

The purpose of pain and discomfort, as I've already said, is to alert us and guide us to the source of something that is wrong so it can be treated, and it will keep doing so until what ails us is restored to full health. Fortunately, in this modern day; once pain has properly delivered us to doctors or dentists or specialists, or whoever; they can usually provide numbing agents to alleviate at least some of the pain until the healing is complete.

Unfortunately, some people who have curable, temporary pains, rather than finding help for their

Joy is not anesthetization

hurt, rather than finding a cure for the cause of pain, rather than seeking a proper diagnosis, treatment, therapy and restoration; they settle for a masking the pain by seeking out pain killers or other highs or pleasures that drown out the cries of the pain system that say “something is wrong, you need to fix it”. In the context of spiritual pain, sometimes people seek to anesthetize themselves to the painful effects of sin and its power in their life by pursuing – pursuits that don’t cause fixes. They chase happiness and excitement and joy -- like amusement parks, a quiet day in the wood, a sporting event, other recreations, sometimes vices, sometimes even spiritual busy-ness and emotional experiences -- and they use these to deny, excuse, distract and bury *proper* pangs of conscience. (Romans 1:21ff, 2:14-15)

Now I’ve said all that, and today’s topic is joy! True biblical joy is not grounded in these types of external feelings, nor is it to be sought as a substitute or a cover up to ignore purposeful pain. Rather, it is an aspect of the fruit (the character traits of God’s Spirit) that will blossom in us -- not by forcing it from the outside by some artificial, or external legalistic performance – [Stern, growly command]: “You gotta wipe that frown off your face and be happy and do it now -- and feel it too!” Is that going to work? No, but by allowing the Spirit to lead us in a step-by-step daily learning lifelong process. He works in and through us only as much as we permit, remember? Our willingness to follow the Spirit’s leading is what I call “releasing the Spirit”, and this week’s focus in how to unleash the power of the Spirit of Christ’s joy in our life.

First, let me clarify that amusement parks, nature walks, sports games, recreation or any other non-

Keys to releasing his joy

destructive, and properly moral activity that gives us happiness is not necessarily wrong. More often than not, it is an expression of and experience of life’s joy and recreation (that word really means re-creating), our emotional, social, mental, physical and spiritual well-being. That is, in fact, a big part of what keeping the Sabbath is all about. It is why God said, “On the seventh day, rest.” Restore yourself, re-create yourself for the next week.

Steven Covey wrote that “You have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage... to say “no” to other things. And the way you do that is by having a bigger “yes” for the things you need to have than the smaller yesses that are clamoring for you to give in to. He even said, “the enemy of the “best” is often

the “good.”” So how do we tell when things, even good things, become the enemy? It is when activities cease to become experiences and expressions of joy, when they cease re-creating; and begin to be a means of *perpetually* escaping, when they interfere with growing up to responsibility; when they hinder becoming all we can be. It is then that even good things can become problematic. We appreciate it when people honor the Sabbath and take a day to rest and renew and be recreated. We experience the freshness of that person when they renew themselves. But if every day of the week is Sabbath, then something’s gone awry.

To see it through the physical world: We appreciate it when people take prescribed medicines to deal with pain so that they can heal and recover, or short of that, if it is chronic, we understand the need for help to feel and function better in those unending types of painful situations. In the same vein, there are many pursuits of external habits and events that may be therapeutic and helpful in putting us in a place where we then can move toward true joy. But if the drugs, habits, or actions are used to mask, to cover over, to deny and bury spiritual failures or relational pains or emotional emptiness or to cure boredom -- when they are used in an effort to *not* deal with and repair what ails us that could otherwise be fixed, then it is hurtful and not helpful, and we may need to take a second look at what we are doing.

In the readings, Jesus clarified how to find true joy in him, by comparing us to branches of his fruitful vine.

First, it is important to understand that we will never find *true*

Prune away (PA): Sin and unproductive living

joy by laughing away or laughing at the grief that is caused by sin or unproductive living. Ecclesiastes explains that just as the crackling of thorns in a fire is a sign of their destruction, so the laughter of the sinner's misconduct reflects shallowness and certainty of their doom. (Ecclesiastes 7:6)

Today’s text tells us not only that we should allow the gardener to cut away the deadness of sin that is within us; we should also allow him to prune back what is OK, (what Covey says are those good things) but they are unproductive things -- so that the plant will bear even more fruit, leading to more abundance and more joy.

I am, by far, not an expert in pruning; but I believe the basic principle is that you cut off extraneous material even if it looks healthy and good, because it forces all the nutrients and energy of the plant to be focused on the production of the fruit

instead of other things, making the food and energy go down extraneous paths and limbs that don't lead to any fruitfulness.

A treasurer – who was a banker and farmer, in a previous church told me about an earlier pastor's visit to their home. He asked them if he could prune – (I'd never do this, but he was from a different country and he knew all about this) he asked them if he could prune. I don't remember what the plants were. He cut them back so far, they were sure he'd killed them all. But time proved that not only had he not killed them, they grew much healthier and more productive than they had ever been, because all the energy was devoted to just the bloom/fruit and not to all the extra limbs and leaves that were not needed.

What am I trying to produce? / On what am I spending energy?

Apply it to life. First ask, what am I trying to produce in my life? What am I trying to be, to do, to accomplish? Then ask, on what am I spending my energy, resources, and time? Do the two things jive? Do you spend energy cultivating what you want to become? Or, is your energy being diverted into all these other distractions so that what you want to become is not getting any attention?

If something consumes your time and prevents you from getting where you want to be, then you either need to re-evaluate what your goals are, or you need to reduce or remove those hindrances from your life, freeing you to nurture what will make you more productive in becoming what you want to be.

A second that helps bring biblical joy is allowing the Spirit to prune out of our life obsessions with disappointments, failures and hurts.

PA: Negative focus (on circumstances)

Do you have a ritual that throws negativity out of your life?

In high school, many players on our basketball team developed the habit of slapping their hands together when they made an error. They make a bad pass, and they'd slap their hands. The idea was to disrupt the flow of the error, slap it away from their attention and snap their focus on the next moment of the game. If they took the time to get upset and think about the mistake they just made, then their distracted focus gets them away from the game and they are more likely to make another blunder. I'm not sure if it worked or not, for our basketball team, but that was the theory. [Clap!] Get rid of it! Move on! Instantly.

Paul and Barnabas preached in Pisidian Antioch and many converted to Christ. Jealous opposition tried to discredit them through abusive talk and stirred up prominent city leaders to expel them from the town. Paul's team shook the dust from their feet -- a ritual that broke their connection with this sad event and place. (They slapped their feet, so to speak) and headed on to the next city. That story in Acts concludes that the disciples were *filled with joy* and with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:44-51) I don't know I could feel that way if I had just been kicked out, especially for trying to do something good. And it would have been very easy to focus on the struggle, and on the persecution, and on the possible unraveling of a great church start in that place. But what the Bible says is that as they literally shook off the dust of that place, they spiritually and emotionally shook off their disappointment of that place, and that empowered them to leave with great joy. I've got a long way to go before I get there.

A third that helps allow God's joy enter our life is to allow God to prune away an *overly* self-

PA Self-focus (through service)

focused perspective. Anxiousness over personal circumstances can often be countered and even overcome by focusing on unselfish, loving service to others. Allow God to accomplish something significant through you to others for Christ. In Luke 10, Jesus instructed and sent out the disciples. They returned with *joy...* Little can compete with the joy of God working through you to accomplish something significant for him and his world.

Is my service a job or a joy?

Quite a few years ago the West MI Conference held a Celebration of the Laity, and they had many laypeople come up and describe their ministries. Some were in the community, some were through organizations, some were on the job, some were at church. One said this: "There is more to being a Christian than washing our ears; putting on a clean shirt and showing up at [worship] service... [then he described his ministry and concluded, "I don't call it a ministry as much as I call it fun".

When you think of serving others, do you see it as one more burdensome task to be done; or do you approach it with joy, and as a privilege and as an opportunity, as a fun experience accomplishing something for God and for others?

Not that every second is always going to be fun. Everything has its challenging down moments, and it becomes easy to forget what it is all about – and Who we

are doing this for and what a difference we are making and what a privilege it is to serve our God. Have you had fun serving others lately? If not, look for the good, the meaning, the accomplishment, the purpose, and you may also begin to rediscover the joy of what we are doing for him.

Cut away things that are rotten, prune back things that are okay, but diverting your energy from what you need to become, move away from self-focus to sacrificial serving of others.

Cut off, Allow, Listen, Abide

The key to all of this happening is allowing Jesus - the Vine -- to connect with us, to allow his nourishment and resurrection energy to be productive through us. The way we do this, Jesus said, is to abide. It is an old kind of word we don't use a lot these days. It just means [interlock fingers] "stay together". [re-interlock the fingers each time the word abide is used in this paragraph] Abide in Christ, abide in his commands, abide in his love, and he will abide in us. And implied in all of this abiding is to listen for his direction in all things, and then to do those things. (James 1:22ff) In the midst of all the pleasures and distractions and brain numbing activities and seemingly endless list of negative circumstances as we look around the world, it seems really difficult to abide. Comedian Tom Papa talks about how this is the first generation that can be exposed to negative news 24-7 -- that constant bombardment, a never-ending stream of crises and corruptions and scandals and negativism – that has an effect on us. He said, "turn it off." Listen for something else. Some people wonder, how do we even begin to hear God's voice?

A Native American was visiting a friend and walking in downtown New York. He stopped suddenly and said, "I hear a cricket." The friend replied, "Oh you're crazy. It's the noon hour. Masses of people are bustling around, cars honking, taxis squealing, sirens wailing; there is no way you can hear a cricket."

"No, I'm sure I hear a cricket!" and he followed his ears to the corner, across the street, and looked around. He went to a shrub in a large cement planter, pushed away some leaves and there he found his cricket. His friend was astounded.

The Cherokee said, "It's nothing special. It just depends on what you are listening for. Let me show you." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of coins, and in the middle of that midday loud bustling, honking, squealing, wailing New York City block, he dropped the coins on the concrete. Every head within that block turned. He said, "See what I mean?" he said as he picked up the coins and put them back in his pocket. "It all depends upon what you are listening for."

Are you listening for God? Are you abiding in Him? Are you allowing Him to abide in you? If so, Jesus says His joy can be in you and your joy may be complete.

Prayer Let's pray. Spirit of God, you come to us as the primary vine, desiring more than anything to graft us into your life. Unfortunately, sometimes, rather than subjecting ourselves to your pruning, we have sometimes chosen to cut ourselves off; shutting the door of our hearts to keep you out. We do not want to *allow* you in, we refuse to *listen*, and we don't *seek* your presence, much less *abide* in your presence.

We are afraid of being consumed in the fire of your Spirit, not realizing that it is the heat of your love that washes us clean and prepares us for your gifts that equip us; and your fruit (your character traits) that begin making us what we ought to be -- and want to be. Yet even then, we hide your fruit and squander your gifts, feeling your character in us and your skills working through us, we fear we lack the strength we need to make a difference even in our own lives. Forgive our unbelief and the weakness of our faith.

Descend on us again. Break down resistance and reluctance in our hearts. Let the fire of your Spirit joyfully dance within us again. Give us faith in the goodness of your claim on our lives, and the courage to live as you direct. Grant us willing spirits, sustain us, and restore to us the joy of our salvation.... (Psalm 51:12) You promise that even if we have seen many and bitter troubles, you will restore our lives again (Psalm 71:20). You will make your face to shine upon us (that is, give a smiling approval) that we may be saved (Psalm 80:3,7,19). We are weak, but you are strong, and our prayer is that we will be fully restored (2 Corinthians 13:9). And you, the God of grace will answer, for you have called us to your eternal glory in Christ, and [in your time] you yourself will restore, strengthen, and establish us [so that we will not falter] (1 Peter 5:10). As we take you with us wherever we go throughout our days, we will find joy and comfort, and you will fill us and thrill us with your loving arms. Amen.

Music (vv 1,3) Precious Name

Blessing Now go blessed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Go with strength and courage to bear the fruit of a joyful life, so that our lives will help transform and renew the earth. Amen.