

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

April 24, 2022

Bright Sunday



**Welcome** He is Risen. **He is Risen Indeed!** This is Bright Sunday the day we celebrate the spreading word that Jesus is not dead and that he has risen, and the joy that people experience as a result. We'll talk a little more about what this day means a little later in the service. Thank you for attending watching, or reading in worship with us.

**Prayer** Lord, as the power and joy of Easter sinks in and spreads to the world, we present ourselves in the confidence that healing, hope, and wholeness will flourish. For by raising Christ from the dead, you have put your stamp of verification and approval on the whole of his work in life, and death, and life again. He came and still comes that we may experience the full joy of life, and we have gathered today to get a taste of your everlasting joy. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

## **Call to Worship**

Lay Reader: {So} Give thanks to [the Lord]! Call on his name! Make his deeds known among the peoples. Sing... praises to him, talk about all his wonders. Glory in his holy name; let those seeking [the Lord] have joyful hearts. Seek [the Lord] and his strength; always seek his presence... {because} He remembers his covenant forever.  
(Psalm 105:1-4,8a (CJB [NIV]))

Music Leader: His new covenant of love is established by Jesus, and it is eternally confirmed because the cross and tomb are empty. Christ is alive and still comes to us here today in the midst of our lives. Let's sing

### **Music (vv 1,2,3,5) Christ is Alive**

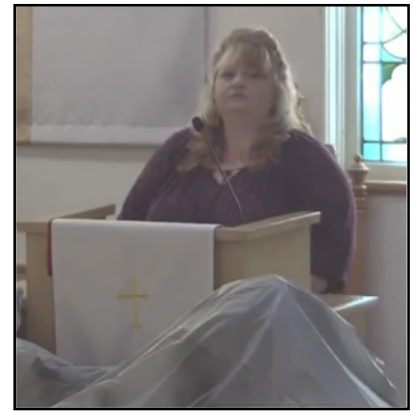
#### **Theme**

I may have told this story before, but it is fitting for the day. Once upon a time, there was a boy named Mickey who was a nice, cheerful, optimistic. {Reminds me of my daughter Sara – always happy}. No one could remember ever having seen him angry. Insults didn't seem to faze him, and he treated no one badly. His teachers admired his positive attitude. It was so unusual that a rumor began that he must have some special secret, secret because no one could figure out how he could remain so positive all the time. Then they began to bug him trying to discover the secret. Finally, one afternoon, Mickey invited his favorite teacher for tea. After tea, Mickey invited him to a special room. The teacher froze when he entered. On the far wall was a most beautiful unique collage of thousands of colors and shapes.

Mickey said, "Some people at school think I am never hurt or think bad thoughts about others. But I am human just like everyone else, and that is not true. But when I was younger, I lashed out in anger at everyone all the time and it kept me in trouble and unhappy -- always. So, with the help of my parents, we started this collage. It has all kinds of materials and colors, and each time someone treated me badly, or I had bad thoughts about myself or someone else and was tempted to treat someone else badly, I would stick another piece on the wall. The teacher got close to the wall and on each piece of paper or material he could read in tiny letters a single word describing a negative thought or act. Mickey continued, "Now when something bad happens, I remember that I can add to my artwork, and that helps me feel better and sometimes it even makes me smile."

The teacher went home and started his own collage. Without revealing that it was Mickey's strategy, he recommended it to other students when they became sad or mad day. Years later, nearly every house had its own wall of art made by cheerful and optimistic children – and adults too. (adapted from Art Town, Pedro Pablo Sacristán).

This is Bright Sunday, which goes by several names these days, I usually clarify by saying it is "Easter Joy Day". It comes from the tradition of Easter Monday, (a day we don't meet so we can't celebrate it very well). Easter Monday was the day



after Easter, the day that the wonderful news of resurrection began to spread, changing confusion, sacrifice, fear, grief and loss to a hilarious beyond belief kind of joy. Traditionally, it was a day filled with jokes and pranks – but don't do pranks – I don't like that kind of humor – practice humor only if it is uplifting and joyful for *everyone* who receives it.

Speaking of artwork, I have in my basement storage (still), two images of Jesus. In one of them, he is laughing, and one of him by the sea smiling broadly (in the context of joyfully providing the great catch of fish for his friends). A poster size of this art was hung as a poster in one church, and one of the parishioners, who was generally a very positive person, said he just had trouble getting used to seeing Jesus that way. And I understand – traditional art tends to focus on Jesus in the garden, on the cross, and in the those other more serious, crisis moments of his life – and not so much did they capture him in the lighter moments – having fun with the children, drawing them to in to himself and doing so many wonderful things, bringing joy to people's lives, such as right after he heals somebody – we don't often see him in the picture, do we? And some of Jesus' humor (often hyperbole (exaggeration) and word play) is lost when translated into English. I like what they call "Dad jokes" which are usually a play on words. But if they were translated into a different language, no one would get the joke, because the words change. And if you are trying to play on similar sounding words, and they don't sound the same in the translation of the other language – it is lost.

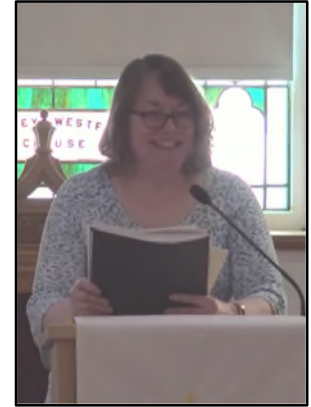
Even John Wesley, who was often thought of as too driven and too disciplining to have a joyful bone in his body, said this: "I am convinced that true religion or holiness cannot be without cheerfulness... and has nothing sour, austere, unsociable, or unfriendly in it."

And why would it, death has been swallowed up in victory -- the final enemy attempting to separate us from God has been overcome and we stand firm on Christ the foundation and cornerstone of our faith. Let's hear one last time the foundational building blocks of establishing and maintaining a rock-solid relationship with God.

### **Series Review and Affirmation**

Lay Reader: We began by **seeing** Jesus and his mission on earth. We learn to grow in **knowing** God personally. We do this by carefully **listening** to him -- and by **speaking** to him as a loving Father. We follow Jesus' example by **serving** others. All these together begin to form a lifestyle, a way of **living, sharing** our

lives with each other, offering ourselves to each other for the betterment of our world -- and as we do, Jesus begins the work a **transformation** within us and in his world. All of this is made possible only by the work of Christ on the cross and his life and **resurrection** power working within us leading to the final brick of **victory** -- for we can know how surpassingly great is his power working in us who trust him. [It is the same power] he used when he worked in the Messiah to raise him from the dead and seat him at his right hand in heaven.” (Ephesians 1:19-20 CJB)  
 Therefore, join me on an affirmation of God’s unconquerable love.



(P - Pastor, **C - Congregation**)

P: We are saved by confidently and patiently trusting God in hope. Someday, creation will be set completely free from its slavery to sin, death, and decay. What are we to do in the meantime?

**C: In our weakness, by faith, the Holy Spirit helps us with our daily problems and in our praying, pleading for us in ways that words cannot express. He asks for us to receive what God desires for his people, and God works for good with those who love him and are called to participate in his purpose.**

P: What shall we say about all these wonderful things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

**C: Certainly not God. He did not spare even his own Son but offered him up for us all.**

P: Who will dare accuse God’s chosen people? Will God?

**C: No, he is the one who forgives us, declares us not guilty, and gives us right standing with him.**

P: Who, then, will condemn us? Will Christ?

**C: No. For he is the one who died for us and was raised to life again. He is sitting at the place of highest honor at the right hand of God, pleading for us there in heaven.**

P: Who then, can separate us from Christ’s love? Will trouble and hardship? Will people who persecute us for our beliefs? Will hunger from a lack of food or being penniless and lacking decent clothes? Will danger or threats of death? Do any of these struggles mean that God has deserted us and doesn’t love us

anymore? Can any of these things take us away from Christ's love?

**C: No, in and despite all of these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ who loved us. For we are convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love.**

P: Is there anything in life or death? anything from angels or heavenly rulers or other powers? Are there any fears for today or worries about tomorrow that can block his love for us?

**C: All the powers of hell itself cannot keep God's love away.**

P: Is there anything in the heights, above the world, or in the deepest ocean, in the world below?

**C: Nothing in all of creation will be able to come between us and God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.** (Inspired by Romans 8:21-39 (TLB, GNT, WE))

**Music Leader:** So let's sing about his love for us and our love for him and the salvation story that floods our hearts by his sin cleansing blood.

**Music Victory in Jesus**

**Music Leader:** And when we reach our heavenly home we will sing the victory song with all the saints.

**Prayer Music (vv 1,2,3) Sing with All the Saints...**

**Prayers** Lord, the day of eternity we look forward to, the news of life we celebrate today -- the Psalmist captured the tone when he wrote, Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

It is good to praise you and bask in your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night. Your deeds make us glad. What you have done with your hands make us sing for joy, for there is no fickleness or wickedness in you. You are our rock of rightness. You created the Universe in beauty, and you restore all things through the victory of Jesus Christ, who taught us to love all people as our neighbors. As so in the next moment of silence we lift up those who are suffering from the fallenness of our world, and from the consequences that that disorder and chaos attempts to create in us. We've heard of you answers, we know needs will always be with us. **Praises and Petitions** Today, we request for a grandson taking meat

on Saturday, and a prayer for Rod Johnson, who is having hip replacement surgery on Thursday. We know there are other on our hearts and minds that we may not have mentioned out loud, we pray for what is going on in our world --- wars, violence, violent storms, and sometimes they are not national or widespread tragedies, they are local or even personal tragedies – in whatever part of the world they might be, families that are hurting, and so Lord, in this next moment of silence, we lift up both our celebrations and praises of what you have done, and for the answers that are coming for those that are in need.

Now Lod, keep us strong in our hope – that all our needs will be answered by you. Keep our hearts receptive to see and experience the comfort, the acts of love, the positive joy you are working out in our lives, knowing that some day our days of artwork will end and we will share in Christ's resurrection, redeemed and restored to the fullness of life and forever freed to be your people, enabled to live as you taught us to pray. **LORD'S PRAYER**

**Special Music Intro** We have been celebrating the victorious resurrection of Christ. Our special music now begins to celebrate the impact -- how it can resurrect our souls to new life even now. An elderly man was in a meeting telling how when he accepted Christ, it seemed “like heaven came down and glory filled my soul” John Peterson was inspired by that phrase and wrote later that week this first song we are going to sing. When we entrust and surrender our lives to Jesus, heaven literally come into our hearts, and we enjoy heavenly riches and heavenly blessings from his hand. Heaven Came Down.



**Seasonal Singers****Heaven Came Down**

O what a wonderful, wonderful day -- day I will never forget!  
 After I'd wandered in darkness away, Jesus my Savior I met.

O what a tender, compassionate friend! He met the need of my heart;  
 Shadows dispelling, with joy I am telling, he made all the darkness depart.

**Refrain**

Heaven came down and glory filled my soul, (filled my soul)  
 When at the cross my Savior made me whole. (made me whole)  
 My sins were washed away. And my night was turned to day.  
 Heaven came down and glory filled my soul.

Born of the Spirit with life from above into God's fam'ly divine;  
 Justified fully thru Calvary's love, Oh, what a standing is mine!  
 And the transaction so quickly was made; when as a sinner I came,  
 took of the offer of grace He did proffer, he saved me, O praise his dear name.

**Refrain**

Now I've a hope that will surely endure after the passing of time  
 I have a future in heaven for sure, there in those mansions sublime.  
 And it's because of that wonderful day when at the cross I believed;  
 riches eternal and blessings supernal from His precious hand I received.

**Refrain****Selected Bible Readings**

Born on a farm outside Dundee, MI (about a 1/2 hour south of Ann Arbor) Judson Wheeler Van DeVenter compared "heaven coming down to our hearts" through the imagery of light and dark -- Peter writes that "God has called you out of darkness and into his own marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9) and Paul writes that God makes his light shine in our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6) This composer acknowledges that for now the darkness remains around us, but the apostle John reminds us that every child of God is able to defeat the world. And we win the victory over the world by means of our faith... [by believing] that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5), and that if we love the Father we will not love [worldliness], [meaning] what the sinful self desires, and he enables us because the Spirit who is in you is more powerful than the spirit that belongs to the world.. (1 John 4:4) and we belong [not to the world and its darkness] but to the light (1 Thessalonians 5:5) And that is why Van DeVenter wrote that salvation means sunlight in our souls....

## Sunlight, Sunlight

I wandered in the shades of night, till Jesus came to me,  
and with the sunlight of His love bid all my darkness flee.

### Refrain

Sunlight, sunlight in my soul today! Sunlight, sunlight all along the way!  
Since the Savior found me, took away my sin,  
I have had the sunlight of his love within.

Tho' clouds may gather in the sky, and billows round me roll,  
however dark the world may be, I've sunlight in my soul.

### Refrain

While walking in the light of God, I sweet communion find;  
O press with holy vigor on, and leave the world behind.

### Refrain

I cross the wide-extended fields, I journey o'er the plain,  
and in the sunlight of his love I reap the golden grain.

### Refrain

Soon I shall see him as he is, the light that came to me,  
behold the brightness of his face, thro'out eternity.

### Refrain

## Introduction to Bible Reading

Both of those songs speak of a personal experience that finds the light and joy of Christ even when surrounded by darkness that threatens to overtake us. The authors were able to compose such lyrics because by grace and faith, the Spirit was able to help them fix their eyes on their ultimate hope. Paul expressed it this way... **Bible Reading** Now, when what is decaying is clothed with what cannot decay, and what is dying is clothed with what cannot die, then the written word will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up by victory!" "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" Now the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory [as conquerors] through our Lord Jesus Christ! Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, since future victory is sure, be strong and steady, always excelling in the work of the Lord, [always doing your best and doing more than is needed], always knowing that the work that you do for the Lord is not vain, futile, nor wasted. It always has purpose.

(1 Corinthians 15:54-58 ISV, TLB, AMP)



## **Sermon Established: By Victory**

Sometimes, we go through periods where our faith may feel futile and purposeless -- may even get boring. A little boy who got impatient in Sunday School, He whined, "Can we hurry up, this is boring!" And the girl next to him punched him in the ribs and said, "Be quiet, it is supposed to be boring."

Early in my ministry I heard an adult give that very argument, that it is good for the church to be boring because someday people are going to go to school or work and get a boring teacher or a boring boss and they will have to know how to listen." I know the great commission directs us to be a lot of things for a lot of people, but I never thought it included the role of being boring so people could learn how to be cope with boring people in other areas of their life."

During a children's sermon, a pastor told the story of how the reluctant missionary, Jonah, was swallowed by a big fish, do you remember that story? And how after Jonah prayed in that fish, he was vomited up on the shore, and from there he went and preached to the to the Ninevites. The pastor asked the children, "What does that story mean for us today?" A small boy guessed, "It proves that even a fish can't stomach a bad preacher?"

On a day designed for lightness and joy, I'll try not to get to deep and heavy into Paul's corrective teaching on resurrection and victory. Somehow the church at Corinth had gotten it into their heads that there was no resurrection connected with our earthly essence. That they were received this new spiritual life and they had this physical life but never the twain shall meet. They were already living out their spiritual, heavenly existence -- and therefore, whatever happened now with their physical bodies, and for example, their ethics, no longer mattered.

Paul reminds them that the good news of salvation he preached to them and on which they built their faith (See 1 Corinthians 15:1-2) not only includes, but hinges on the reality of Christ's resurrection. (See 1 Corinthians 15:13-14,17b), and our resurrection, and as great as their new spiritual life in Christ is, their resurrection would be so much more than what they were currently experiencing. God breathed life into our earthly bodies, but these bodies do not last forever. Christ offers a spiritual life and body that does last forever. We don't have those bodies yet, but it's coming -- when we die or when Christ returns. And at *that* time, we are transformed into something into a glorified body that will live eternally in the heavenly kingdom.

In the meantime, Paul urges us to live a life of heavenly character and behavior -- we can do that in these current bodies even if we cannot have the heavenly body itself - yet. I just very briefly skimmed over the surface of a long, detailed argument that he gives, but even so it may feel like we got tugged under the water a little bit, so let's move ahead before I get spit out on the shore 😊. We heard Paul wrap up his argument with triumphant exultation.

Death's sting is gone because Christ took the stinger. (1 Corinthians 15:54-57) Think of someone deathly allergic to bee stings. They don't have their epinephrine (the shot that counteracts the allergy) and this person is riding in a car in which a bee has gotten loose and flying around, and the person is terrified. The driver stops the car and captures the bee which of course naturally stings him. Then he lets the bee go and it resumes buzzing around in the car -- the one allergic is still terrified, but the driver assures him that he doesn't have to not worry because the sting has been removed. The devil runs around like a roaring lion or a buzzing bee trying to scare us and intimidate us, but death can no longer tyrannize, it will finally be defeated, swallowed up in the victory of the resurrection and transformation of Christ and it will be that way for all who follow him. The poison of sin's stinger is neutralized by the nails of Jesus. The stinger is removed, and it is just a matter of time before the salvation is *fully* realized for each of us.

We began the service by celebrating the resurrection of Christ, then we moved to celebrating our future resurrection and the taste of it we have even now -- but all of that has to come to some sort of application. Paul finishes, as does with all of his theological arguments, with a practical application of all that we celebrated. The Corinthian church, in errantly thinking there was no future resurrection -- that there was nothing more to look forward to, nothing important about how we live in this life -- led to sloppiness in their living. Errant thinking often leads to errant living. They became proud, selfish, and complacent about their faith.

In seminary I was studying the history of the denomination I was in at the time. World War II had just ended, and someone wrote an article lamenting the fact that the denomination had grown only 3 % that year. Think about that. There were probably lots of variables and factors involved, but this article claimed that people got complacent and stopped taking faith's message seriously -- especially concerning the afterlife. We weren't scaring people toward heaven, we needed more fire and brimstone this article seemed to teach. Sounds like an overly singular and simplistic. But it does illustrate that when we don't make a connection between

this life and the next, when there is nothing spiritual to look forward to (or to avoid), then there is a temptation to relax spiritually, to become apathetic, to refocus on the wrong priorities, looking only for the here and now, and not to how the here and now applies to what our future holds, and maybe even lose our hope in difficult times.

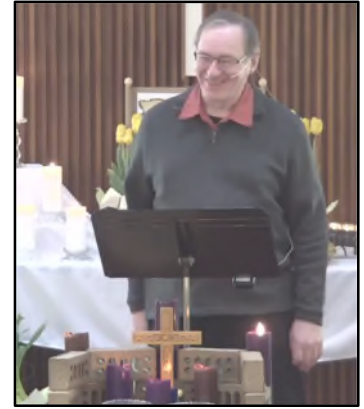
On the other hand, right thinking leads to right living. Paul's letters to Corinth seems to be one correction after another, and there is a letter in-between we only get a hint of which isn't in the Bible and there were corrections written there, and then repeated again in the second letter that we do have. Correction after correction after correction. They resisted Paul's leadership at every turn and tries to teach them that "this" is what I thought you and "this" is the way it is supposed to be, but even as he is telling them all of these things that they somehow got mixed up on, Paul's still sees for them and for himself a future. Even with all their differences of opinion and their rejection of his authority, he still calls them his dear brothers and sisters, and loved ones with the same heavenly Father over both of them.

He encourages them to not let people move them off track from what he taught them, and to give themselves fully to the work of the Lord – whatever you do, do for God, and whatever you do for God, give yourselves fully to it, because we do have a future hope, and *that hope is not disconnected from how we live now.*

Paul becomes convinced – the way he starts the chapter it almost sounds like he has to convince himself and not just the Corinthians, but by the end of the chapter he is convinced that because of Christ's victory, everything we do should be done the very best we can, and nothing that we do for God will be not worth doing, or to put it positively, everything we do for God will be worth doing. Even though these people are off track on a lot of topics, he knows they will come around, they will rediscover their footing and again work with all they are for their future because they would again come to realize that there is a resurrection to look forward to, and a participation in that life that begins even now as we live each day more and more in the likeness of Christ.

The question, then, is do we live like victims or victors? Do we spend time blaming and excusing -- or becoming and taking responsibility? Do we seek to cope -- or do we seek to change? Do we settle for fatalism -- or seek to fulfill our destiny – in Christ? Do settle for existing when we could be excelling? Do we try to protect ourselves or perfect ourselves? Stand firm, give your all, make a difference.

Before my time – 1913. Before some of your times too, maybe. 😊. It is Bright Sunday, right? The French Alps. They didn't manage forests in those days, so the mountains in the area had been stripped clean. That brought in ferocious winds because there were no trees to slow it down. Villages became ghost towns because the springs and brooks ran dry because there was no foliage to gather that water.



While mountain climbing, Jean Giono came to a shepherd's hut. The shepherd is named – and I am going to take my best guess at a French name: Elzeard Bouffier (el-ze-are boo-fay?) He invited Giono to spend the night. After dinner, Giono watched the shepherd meticulously sort through a pile of acorns, discarding those that were inferior, cracked or undersized. When the shepherd had counted out 100 perfect acorns, he stopped for the night and went to bed. The 55-year-old shepherd had been planting trees on the wild, barren hillsides for over 3 years. He planted 100,000 trees. 20,000 sprouted. Of those, he expected half to be eaten by rodents or die to the elements, or simply not survive.

After WW I Giono returned to the mountainside and discovered a forest, accompanied by nature's chain reaction -- water flowed in the once empty brooks. The ecology sheltered by that leafy roof of trees that bonded to the earth making a mat of spreading roots, making the land hospitable for willows, rushes, meadows, gardens, and flowers – it all came back to life.

Giono returned again after WW II. Twenty miles from the battle fronts, the shepherd had continued his work, ignoring the war of 1939 just as he had ignored that of 1914. The reformation of the land continued. The whole region glowed with environmental health.

Giono writes: "On the sight of the ruins I had seen in 1913 now stand neat, prosperous farms. The old streams fed by the rains and snows that the forest conserved by the trees are flowing again. Little by little the villages have rebuilt. People from the plains where land is costly, have come back, settling here, bringing youth, motion, and the spirit of adventure."

Those who hope in the next life are like spiritual re-foresters here, in this life. digging holes in barren land, planting the seeds of life and hope of others. Through these seeds, dry spiritual wasteland is transformed into harvestable fields because life-giving water has been given to parched and barren souls.

The victorious Christ leads us to a life where everything we do for him is fully worthwhile, not just for our future in the next life, but for this life here and those who follow us. So let us go forth and make a difference in eternal things by building our lives here – in people and relationships.

Branch Rickey was in baseball for over 50 years. (People who lived in 1913 😊) I don't remember him, but after those 50 years of baseball, a reporter asked him, "Think back, what was the greatest thrill you got out of baseball?" He said, "My greatest thrill? I haven't had it yet." That is a person that is alive with joy – still anticipating that the best of life is ahead and not behind. The resurrection is in front of us, not behind us, and the resurrection gives hope and joy and enthusiasm for life now... because we find that heaven has come down and provided the sunshine-y joy of resurrection in our souls now -- Paul puts it this way: (He gives us the Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come and that gives us courage to live fully now, living carefully, wisely, making the most of every opportunity -- May we all experience that in our time... It is the *carpe diem* thing, Seize the day, redeem the time, and please God whether we are here -- or there.

(2 Corinthians 5:5-9 with Ephesians 5:15-16)

**Closing Prayer** Let's pray – (and the prayer begins with a prayer used by Smiles Unlimited, a clown ministry serving hospitals, homes, and prisons). Lord, as we stumble through this life, help us 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 the aged. Never let me forget that my total effort is to cheer people, make them happy, and forget, at least for the moment, all the unpleasant things in their lives. And Lord, in my final moment, may I hear you whisper, when you made my people smile, you made me smile." Now Lord, fill us with your light and life and love, victors in the midst of strife as you presence with us leads us forward. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

**Music** *Joyful, Joyful*

**Blessing** Now go - established in the rock-solid love of God by [seeing, knowing, listening, speaking, and serving, living and transforming,] nurturing a growing relationship with our *risen* Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who makes it all possible by leading, our old lives to the cross, and through it raises us to new and victorious eternal life. Amen.