

Call to Worship

L: When we feel down-hearted...

P: Jesus says: "Rise!"

L: When we wonder if we can continue on our journey...

P: Jesus says: "I am with you. You have nothing to fear."

L: When we hunger and thirst in our souls for relief...

P: Jesus says: "Come, follow me."

L: Lord of hope and possibilities, be with us today.

All: Open our hearts and spirits to feed upon your healing word. AMEN.

Prayer of Preparation

Lord of hope and light, shine into our darkness and bring hope to our souls. Remind us again of the wonderful ways you have cared for us when we were lost. Open our hearts to receive your loving spirit. Refresh our minds with knowledge of your everlasting power and compassion. We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus the Christ. AMEN.

Scripture: Psalm 30

Sermon: Joy comes with the morning!

Hymns:

1. Morning Has Broken ... Pilgrim Hymnal #38
2. Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart ... Pilgrim Hymnal #345 (verses 1-4)
3. Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come ... Pilgrim Hymnal #130

PSALM 30:1-6, 11-12 (NRSV)

INTRODUCTION: Tradition holds that David and Solomon wrote the Psalms ... maybe ... the truth is that we just do not know who the author(s) are ... nor do we know when they were written, although they are almost certainly very old, written and edited and shaped and compiled during the millenium between the reign of Israel's King David and the birth of Jesus.

The secondary superscription to the Psalm "A Song at the dedication of the temple" indicates the use of this Psalm in Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) after the cleansing of the temple by Judas Maccabeus in 164 BC. That would not be the first time that hymns of praise and thanksgiving by an individual were adopted for use by the entire congregation.

The word "joy" is used twice in this psalm, or hymn of thanksgiving and praise. The word joy as used here and as used in other places in the Scriptures means much more than the usual meaning of the word "happiness." Joy in this context means a sense of well-being related to knowing God and God's actions and love ... for Christians that joy, that knowledge of God, comes specifically in and through Jesus Christ.

PSALM 30:1-6, 11-12 (NRSV)

**Thanksgiving for Recovery from Grave Illness
A Psalm. A Song at the dedication of the temple. Of David.**

**1 I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up,
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.
2 O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.
3 O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol, [PRONOUNCE "SHEE ol"]
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.**

**4 Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.
5 For his anger is but for a moment;
his favor is for a lifetime.
Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.**

**11 You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have taken off my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,
12 so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.**

HERE ENDS OUR READING FROM THE SCRIPTURES.

SERMON Joy comes with the morning!
First Parish Church, Brunswick ME, 7-28-2019, Psalm 30

Rev. Dr. Alan Baughcum

Prayer: God of all of those of us whose ears are slow to hear and whose tongues are hesitant to sing, please fill us with your joy. Help us to hear your word more clearly, to serve you more gladly, and to sing your praises more eagerly. Amen!

Someone once alleged that each preacher only has one sermon, and every sermon by that preacher is simply a variation on that one sermon. Having been a preacher now for a considerable number of years, that seems to be true for me.

My sermons are variations on the one sermon that the one and true God, the God of Israel, so loved the world that he took on flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth about two thousand years ago ... not to condemn Creation and its creatures but to save it and us from despair and waywardness. That same Jesus was killed by the Roman authorities but rose from the dead on the third day. Jesus is alive ... I have met him through the Holy Spirit. Jesus is just as alive today as any other person I have ever met.

Jesus came to us preaching the Kingdom of God and showing us how to live as if that Kingdom was already fulfilled, an event we anticipate and long for. My one sermon is all about the joy of serving Jesus, as we work and serve and prepare for the coming of God's realm. In my encounter with our Savior, Jesus spoke the word "joy" to me ... and I was filled with joy, a joy that has stayed with me for the last 43 years.

That joy, the joy I want to share with you, is a sense of well-being that comes from knowing that our God is loving and sovereign. That joy sustains us in the hard times and undergirds us in the good times. We are not promised lives with no suffering but we are promised that God's joy can be with us through it all. Joy is available to us right there in the scriptures, including the Psalm we heard this meaning.

One way of saying that joy is available to us is to say that our lives are sometimes comedies but they are not finally follies. Our lives are sometimes dramas but ultimately are not tragedies. God is in charge ... not heads of state or heads of governments ... God is in charge. And God is working his purposes out in the history of our universe, of our world. We can serve as God's helpmates in the working out of God's purposes. We are called to serve.

Joy comes to us as our service is grounded in God's purposes ... not always our first choice of purposes ... God's purposes. The Bible tells us that Jesus was motivated to his service and work by God's joy: "...the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2)

So, where has all the joy gone? It is not there in the newspaper or the radio or television. A recent study of popular music compared the sentiments expressed in music from the 1950s onward to the present day. The news is not good. Anger is up 232%. Disgust is up by 128%. Joy is down 38%. [Kathleen Napier, Lior Shamir. Quantitative Sentiment Analysis of Lyrics in

Popular Music. Journal of Popular Music Studies, Vol. 30, No. 4, December 2018 DOI: 10.1525/jpms.2018.300411.]

I remember a lot of good, fun music from my youth. Remember “Good Vibrations?” “Stand by Me?” And my personal favorite, “I Got You Babe.”

Not knowing anything about current popular musical, I Googled and discovered a recent hit song with the title, “Turn Down for What” with lyrics “Fire up that loud ... Another round of shots Fire up that loud ... Another round of shots.” And, if you find the lyrics hard to understand, do not make the mistake of watching the accompanying video. It is indescribable, and not in a good way!

Why has there been such a decrease in joy? By any quantitative measure of well-being (income, wealth, crime, health, life expectancy, etc.), human beings are better off by far now than we were in the 1950s. If you do not believe me, look at the work of Steven Pinker, a Harvard University Psychology Professor. He has a very powerful TED talk and a very long book published this year, both making the same point. Citizens of earth are much better off than at any time in human history and the trend lines all point to continued improvement. [The title of his book is Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress, Viking, 2018.]

PAUSE ... yes, I know that we still face a lot of problems, including climate change ... but I am an optimist, convinced that we can make progress on even those tough problems ...

So, if we are all so much better off than ever, why aren't we joyful about that? Where has the joy gone?

To help answer that question, I turn to a New York Times op-ed of several years ago (Nov. 4, 2016). One of the authors is Dr. Arthur Brooks, an economist (as was I before being ordained) who will be visiting Bowdoin College this coming year as a Visiting Fellow. In the op-ed, written with his friend and teacher, the Dalai Lama, they argue that people are unhappy and discontented because we no longer feel as needed as once we did.

Research has shown, for example, that senior citizens who do not feel useful to others are nearly three times to die prematurely as those who do feel useful. We all need to be needed. Being needed, they write, is part of “a natural human hunger to serve our fellow men and women.” The Buddhists teach “If one lights a fire for others, it will also brighten one's own way.”

Selflessness and joy are intertwined. Virtually all of the world's major religions teach that diligent work in the service of others is our highest nature and lies at the center of a happy life. Americans who make a priority of serving others are three times as likely to say they are very happy about their lives. In Germany it's five times.

It's not just senior citizens who may not feel needed. Compared with the 1960s, there are a lot more working-age men now who are completely outside the work force ... not just in America, but throughout the developed world. Feeling useless and unneeded leads to social isolation and pain.

How do we get the joy back? We can take steps to do that ... each of us individually and all of us collectively. For example, when I am down in the dumps and walking around with a frown on my face, I sometimes wonder why everyone I pass or meet seems so gloomy. And then I remember to smile ... smiling at someone is amazing ... other people smile back!! Just as we can communicate gloom, so also can we communicate happiness, even joy.

Don't stop at smiling ... start a conversation ... ask the other person how they are doing and signal with attentiveness in eye contact and body language that we really want to hear what they have to say. We can listen and ask ourselves what kinds of gifts are present in ourselves and in the other person than can be of service to one another, to the community, to the church ... and when we part from the other person, remember them in our prayers to God ... prayers of thanksgiving and concern and a desire for their well-being.

Leaders, those in authority and in positions of responsibility, have opportunities to help us act collectively to create societies in which everyone can feel useful and needed. Children must be educated and trained, not only in employable skills but also in the intangibles that strengthen faith and love. Schools and churches are being called to good and important work. Parents need support through community and religious institutions, and a well-constructed social infrastructure. Those without biological families must be welcomed into families of choice, a challenge for all of us to be attentive and intentional in our faith journeys.

Dr. Brooks has a new book out that goes into even greater detail on what we can do to recapture the joy of service to others. I've read it and can recommend it. It is very readable and offers practical ideas for all of us. [Love Your Enemies, Broadside Books, 2019] Cannot imagine where he got the title for his book!

How do we take steps towards recovering the joy? How do we love our enemies ... note: love, not just tolerate ... tough stuff! We ask for God's help.

In verses that Donna did not read, the psalmist became quite pleased with how well he was doing in life and then ran into problems, deadly problems. Whoever wrote Psalm 30 had a life-threatening experience, whether due to ill health or direct physical threat from someone else. He was heading for the place of death, of isolation, of hopelessness. God pulled him back and restored his life.

Joy came as the psalmist realized that he was not in charge of his life, God was. Recognizing that reality, the psalmist cried out in the night of desolation to God and sought God's help. God, the source of all our lives and all of our joy, responded with restored health and safety ... joy came in the morning.

Restoration came as the psalmist confronted the fact that she was not self-sufficient. The psalmist, as do we all, needed help from God. When that help came, the psalmist could not remain silent but was moved to praise. That praise would have been voiced in the community, in the congregation. We are not alone when we suffer and we must share with the community when we rejoice at our healing.

In their op-ed the Dalai Lama and Brooks tell us how that praise can be made concrete. They argue that we need, individually and collectively, to work on building a compassionate society. That compassion comes as we create a wealth of opportunities for meaningful service and work so that everyone can contribute and feel needed. All of us can contribute. All of us need to be needed. Together, following the example of Jesus with God's direction and help, we can turn our very human need into joyful relationship with our sisters and brothers, in our community and all over the world. Amen, and amen!

PASTORAL PRAYER

**Eternal and Holy God, you are steadfast in your love.
We know that you have heard the unspoken prayers of gratitude
of the members and friends of this congregation this morning.
We give you thanks and praise
for the gifts of health and fellowship
and all the manifold other graces
with which you have blessed us.**

**We know also
that you have heard other heartfelt cries
from this congregation this morning,
the cries that are sad and depressed and angry and lonely --
the cries of the ill,
the cries of parents for their children,
the cries of children for parents,
the cries of the weary,
the cries of the fearful, the cries of the friendless.
We lift up all these to you,
for you are the only one who can respond
with what we so desperately need:
healing, compassion, faith, comfort, and joy.**

**God of all truth and wisdom,
as we move into mid-summer,
we ask a special blessing on those taking a break from school.
Our children need special graces in these troubling times.
We trust them to your care
and ask for strength and guidance
for parents, teachers, and school administrators
as we try to help, support, and direct them.**

**We also ask that you bless the work of adults
who vacation and then return
to their labor.**

**On this weekend
we ask your blessings on all
who work with hands, hearts, and mind for their daily bread.**

**Some of us are retired from our jobs and professions.
Bless the important work and service
that we do as volunteers and unpaid workers
in the creation of better lives for all.**

**Bless also all who cannot participate in these activities
because of illness or advanced age.**

**Their lives are also important,
to you and to us.**

Provide all with your healing grace and hope for tomorrow.

**Gracious and Good Creator,
we are a people
who have been richly blessed
in this wonderful land of opportunity.**

Teach us to share our wealth with a world in great need.

**Thank you for churches
that are trying hard to live up to your calling
in their community.**

Give all of us a vision for the future as we serve a needy world.

**Most of all we thank you for loving us enough
to send us your Son, who called us to follow him.**

We tend to stray, yet your grace gently pulls us back.

**Walk with us and hold us
as we boldly and joyfully take the next step on our journey.**

We ask all these things in the precious name

Of our Savior, Jesus the Christ,

Who taught us to say together, "Our God ... Amen."

BENEDICTION

**Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.**

Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

The Lord is near.

**Do not worry about anything,
but in everything by prayer**

and supplication with thanksgiving

let your requests be made known to God.

**And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

LET THE PEOPLE SAY, "AMEN."