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 Holy Humor Sunday

***Rejoice!***  
***Philippians 4:4-8***

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

**5** Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

**6** Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

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

**8** Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

**9** Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

I don't think it matters much which national news station you watch,  
 you are bound to see someone with a ***very serious face*** telling you some very serious news  
 involving some very serious situation---

They wait til the end of the half hour for anything resembling good news.

There's not a lot of news anymore that's true, commendable, excellent, or praiseworthy, is there?  
 It's a ***glass half empty*** kind of report most of the time.

In fact, the the stories of ***our lives*** are often not very positive either!

We walk into church with jobs that stress us,  
 marriages that hurt us,  
 kids that rip out our hearts,  
 illnesses that threaten to keep us in bed,  
 parents that worry us to death,  
 finances that boggle the mind....  
 and then we get here and hear God say  
***REJOICE!***

***How*** are we supposed to do that?

Well, let's take this Sunday for instance—***Holy Humor Sunday***.

It's the day when we celebrate the joy of the resurrection!

But do you realize what it means to have resurrection?

It means that first of all, ***something has died***.

***Resurrection is new life***, after an old life has gone away.

When you realize that about resurrection,

we start to see how God's word to rejoice  
really does *apply to each one of us* here today, doesn't it?  
We all have something that has died in our lives, right?  
And *can't we all use some resurrection power*,  
Some new life where there wasn't any?

So, just in case your mental state is a bit down in the dumps today,  
how about *hearing some funny stories*?  
I'll try to keep a straight face.

.....  
***A minister waited in line to have his car filled with gas*** just before a long holiday weekend. The attendant worked quickly, but there were many cars ahead of him in front of the service station. Finally, the attendant motioned him toward a vacant pump.

"Preacher," said the young man, "I'm sorry about the delay. It seems as if everyone waits until the last minute to get ready for a long trip."

The minister chuckled, "I know what you mean. It's the same in my business."

.....  
***A nun who works for a local home health care agency***  
was out making her rounds when she ran out of gas.  
As luck would have it there was a station just down the street.  
She walked to the station to borrow a can with enough gas to start the car and drive to the station for a fill up.

The attendant regretfully told her that the only can he owned had just been loaned out, but if she would care to wait he was sure it would be back shortly.

Since the nun was on the way to see a patient she decided not to wait and walked back to her car. After looking through her car for something to carry to the station to fill with gas, she spotted a bedpan she was taking to the patient. Always resourceful, she carried it to the station, filled it with gasoline, and carried it back to her car.

As she was pouring the gas into the tank of her car two men walked by. One of them turned to the other and said: "Now that is what I call faith!"

.....  
***A priest, an evangelist, and a minister were in a rowboat*** in the middle of a pond fishing. None of them had caught anything all morning.

Then the evangelist stands up and says he needs to go to the bathroom so he climbs out of the boat and walks on the water to shore. He comes back ten minutes later the same way.

Then the minister decides he needs to go to the bathroom, too, so he climbs out of the boat

and walks on the water to shore. He, too, comes back the same way ten minutes later.

The priest looks at both of them and decides that his faith is just as strong as his fishing buddies and that he can walk on water, too. He stands up and excuses himself. As he steps out, he makes a big splash down into the water.

The evangelist looks at the minister and says, "I suppose we should have told him where the rocks were."

.....

Sometimes what we need is to hear something funny!  
And what better place to hear it, than in **church**!  
Isn't this where we come to hear the **GOOD news**?  
Isn't this where we want to **receive joy**?

Despite all the junk in your own life,  
Doesn't some part of you want to heed Paul's words today,  
**Rejoice, and again I say, rejoice?**

Even if you are a **glass half empty** kind of a person,  
Doesn't a part of you want to rejoice?  
Especially here in church?

Because it's not so easy when you **leave here**, is it?  
Believe me, I know.

But what if, these words—**Rejoice, and again I say rejoice**,  
What if they **don't** apply to our circumstances or our feelings,  
What if God is **NOT** asking us to 'see the glass half-full'  
Or just think, 'it's ok, everything will be all right'.

But rather, in spite of it all,  
What if it means we know **that God is with us**,  
And God can give us the ability to rejoice.  
To have joy—somehow, someway.  
Regardless of what's going on, or how we feel.

Rejoice, which means be joyful, is a Greek word **chairō**,  
from the Greek **chara**—joy, and **charis**—grace.  
It's not something you just do, it's a gift.  
Joy is a gift from God.  
Nothing to do with what's going on at the time.  
It's an amazing gift, of God's grace.

And you know what?  
We are asked to rejoice,  
**Before** we are told that the peace of God, which passes all understanding,

Will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

***First, we rejoice.***

But how about an important **distinction**?

We've probably all heard this before, but

Joy in the Bible is different than happiness.

***Happiness*** can depend upon our circumstance, or our feelings.

Happiness is what the world wants for us. Get this, be happy. Feel good.

***Joy*** is something deeper, stronger, longer.

Joy is what God wants for us.

Joy is not based in our circumstances.

But ***IN THE LORD***. Rejoice in the Lord.

Not in your situation. Not in your feelings...both may stink.

***In the Lord***....for what does it say?

***The Lord is near***. (to which I say, all the time).

So we rejoice, we receive the ***joy*** that God offers us.

Joy comes up a lot in the Bible, as you might guess.

What you might not know is ***when*** it appears.

***Jesus*** mentions joy a lot in the ***context*** of things like labor pains, talking about his death, and when he will leave them alone....

The ***Psalms*** talk about joy coming in the morning...

after weeping in the night,

after mourning the loss of a loved one.

***Lamentations*** talks about joy in the same breaths

that it mentions the death of children.

Apparently God is serious about

Joy not being related to circumstance, but ***in spite of it***.

Joy is ***not*** about knowing everything is all right,

It's about knowing that ***God is with us***.

Always.

It's about receiving the gift of rejoicing,

***Even in, especially in, the midst of pain.***

Haven't you ever ***had to laugh***, because otherwise you'd just sit down and cry?

Haven't you ever received the gift of something funny,

while you feel down in the dumps?

Mark Twain once said, ***The secret source of humor itself is not joy, but sorrow.***

The writers of the Bible would certainly agree.

I read this week another great quote: *The sadnesses of life, far from discouraging laughter, actually give rise to it.*

Ooh, I believe that.  
 I think one reason I have such *a loud and obnoxious laugh*  
 (yes, I know that it can be heard from far far away..),  
 is because I have seen a fair amount of sorrow in my life.  
 I really believe that a *depth of sorrow* gives you  
 a *greater capacity for laughter, and joy*.  
 At least that's been true in my life.

I remember something funny that happened at my *Grandpa's graveside service*.  
 He was a very funny, joyful man, who loved the Lord.  
 Always a smile, always laughter.  
 So it was very fitting that during a very serious part of his graveside service,  
 in the middle of a driving rainstorm,  
 as we are standing in front of his casket,  
 it starts to slide off the cart...sliding right off of there before they were lowering it into the  
 ground.  
 We couldn't help but bust out laughing.  
 Because we knew he was surely laughing in heaven!

*Ever felt giddy for no reason,*  
 smiling when you should have been sobbing,  
 dancing when you were grieving,  
 laughing while crying?

*We know that,*  
 Babies are born in the middle of tragedies.  
 Laughter is heard in oncology units,  
 Singing is a favorite pastime in nursing homes.

God gives us *joy and laughter as a gift*—especially when we *need it most*.

C.S. Lewis wrote a wonderful little book called  
*The Screwtape Letters* ...about the Big Daddy Devil Screwtape writing to a Junior Devil named  
 Wormwood about how to convert humanity and bring them to hell.  
 Quite an interesting read.

On the subject of **joy** The Big Devil Screwtape is writing to the Junior Devil Wormwood and he  
 says this:

*I divide the causes of human laughter into joy, fun, the joke and flippancy. You will see  
 the first (JOY) among friends and lovers reuniting on the eve of a holiday. Among adults  
 some pretext in the way of jokes is usually provided, but the facility with which the  
 smallest witticism produces laughter at such a time, shows that that's not the real cause  
 [of this joy]. What the real cause is we do not know. Something like [this joy] it is*

*expressed in much of that detestable art which the humans call music, and something like it occurs in heaven."*

*[ joy, ] to us it is a meaningless acceleration in the rhythm of celestial experience, quite opaque to us. .... Laughter of this kind does us no good and should always be discouraged. Besides the phenomena is of itself disgusting and a direct insult to the realism, dignity and austerity of hell."*

C.S. Lewis himself writes that "**Joy is the serious business of heaven**,  
It's the grand truth.  
It's the **surprise** that happens when we discover God's love."

### **Joy.**

An acceleration of the celestial experience....

The surprise of God's love...

The business of heaven...

Ahh.

**Now, do you want to rejoice?**

**So, when** does this gift of grace, this gift of joy happen?  
It can happen, ANYTIME—because the Lord is always near us!

But Jesus spoke of it frequently with **OTHERS**,  
With the disciples—he said things like **you, plural** will have pain,  
but your pain will turn into joy,  
ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.

Joy is often experienced with others.  
Paul knew this, and he often wrote about the **joy of fellowship** with other believers.

So this is one reason we're here today—  
We're here together to **experience the joy** of fellowship!  
We're here to **open our hearts to the joy** of the Lord!  
We're here to rejoice because **God is good---all the Time!**

But when we leave this place,  
We also can make **room for the joy**.

It can happen when we are **OVERWHELMED** by the glory of God,  
While captivated by a child's smile,  
a beautiful lake,  
a sensational sunset  
Ever had one of those moments  
that can only be described as a **God-sighting?**  
That's making room for Joy.

We can also be **AWARE** of God's presence all around us.

The Lord is near—are you aware of it?

Can you see Christ in the people near you?

In the beauty of creation all around you?

We can be **WITH** other believers

Are you taking time to worship each week, and

To fellowship and enjoy time together?

Are you making time to study the Bible and pray with one another?

We can be **NEAR** the Lord in WORD and PRAYER

Are we taking quiet times at home, in the car, outdoors, or at work?

Wherever, whenever we can pray, read, and be quiet?

We can **THINK** about the good things,

like whatever is pure, and honorable, and noble, and holy, and righteous...anything worthy of praise—think about these things.

By many estimates we see thousands of negative images every day.

But what if we put something positive in our minds for a change?

We can be **THANKFUL**...the word for joy in Greek is *chara*, the word for grace *charis*. Put a little prefix *eu* on the beginning and you have *eucharist*, or thanksgiving, which is our word for communion.

Many authors, pastors, and theologians have suggested that we can live a *Eucharistic life*, a life filled with thoughts of thanksgiving, of gratitude and grace, in other words, a life of joy.

Ann Voskamp wrote a soul-stirring book called '*One Thousand Gifts*', that I highly recommend to you.

In it she seeks to live a Eucharistic life,

to live each day *taking stock of the gifts* of God all around her,

and noticing just how much *gratitude changes everything* in her life.

By making note of *1000 gifts and more*---some as small as sun shining on the soap bubbles as she does the dishes, she realizes that *all of life is a gift*—and joy can be found....

even amidst the tragedy of losing her baby sister,

even amidst the stress of their farming life,

the worries of their feeble finances,

the trials of raising 6 kids.

Friends, hear the *Good News* of the Gospel

Joy is one of the greatest gifts we can receive,

Regardless of our feelings or our circumstance.

Laughter and rejoicing are the gifts of grace in the middle of pain.  
Let's make room for even more of it! Amen.