

Holy, Healing, Laughter.

I think that one of the things that I have missed the most during this pandemic, is being able to see people smile! Now, I know that even behind mask you could perhaps tell from a person's eyes if they were smiling – or from their voice – but it is not the same as seeing them smile.

What a huge relief when things began to open and we were finally able to be outside without a mask. And did you notice that people just smiled at each other more – even total strangers!

And, smiling is contagious. When one person smiles at you, it is a natural reaction to smile back.

I don't know how many of you have travelled on a subway train in rush hour – but the weary, tiered faces of people around you can sometimes be quite depressing. It's gloomy to be immersed in that. Imagine if, instead, they were all smiling.

When you smile, it is also really hard to be angry. Of course it is possible to have that sarcastic smile (demonstrate), or that know-it-all laugh. And I know that there is a lot of debate among scientists and researchers in emotional theory about reading someone's emotional state from their facial expressions. But still – when you really smile or laugh - it is hard to be angry.

I had a friend who was a certified laughter leader. Yes, there actually is such a thing! It's a yoga based therapy that works on the scientific knowledge that when we laugh, we oxygenate our bodies and our brains, which makes us feel more healthy and energetic.

In the workshops the trained leader takes you through a series of laughter exercises, such as shoulder chuckles(demonstrate), and belly laughs (demonstrate), and it involves eye contact with others, and a child-like playfulness. And believe it or not, it is totally contagious, and pretty soon a room of fake laughter truly turns into real laughter! The slogan is "Simulate laughter, to stimulate laughter."

Now, I'm not going to make you all do laughter exercise. But, I do want you to turn to people around you. Smile, wave, tell them a joke if you have one, try just laughing together. (Congregational sharing - end with a joke)

(if we are on line: start at 2.14- 6.43)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVkG3L79sL4&ab_channel=BiancaSpears

Now didn't that feel better just to laugh?

Clinical research suggests that laughter lowers the levels the stress hormones in the blood – in other words it is literally healing!

And there is no doubt that we all need healing in this difficult time.

I also have no doubt that God wants us to be healed.

In our reading from Ecclesiastes today we are reminded that there is a season for everything. I think recently we have been in a season to weep and mourn.

We mourn the thousands of Covid deaths around the world.

We mourn the loss of businesses, the rise in mental health issues, and the increase in domestic violence.

We weep with the Muslim community at the tragic act of racism that took the lives of four innocent people that were just out for a walk.

We weep with our Indigenous brothers and sisters as more graves are found at residential schools.

There has been so much to weep and mourn in the last year.

But, the scripture reminds that there is also a time to laugh and to dance.

While I truly believe that God weeps with us when we weep, I am equally convinced that God wants us to be healed. Laughter and dancing is healing. As Jesus said: *'Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.'* (Luke 6:21)

Sometimes in church we are guilty of just taking ourselves too seriously. We become so obsessed with tradition and ritual, that we forget about the playful nature of God.

God was, and is, creative – and creativity is playful – it is also joyful. For those of you who have young children, or grandchildren, you will understand how much joy children get from playing. They laugh and giggle while they play dress-up; they smile as they kick a ball around or throw a frisbee; they love to dance; they smile as they create things from play-do, do chalk drawings, or get covered in paint and glue. Sometimes as we grow up we lose that childlike ability to play. We begin to take ourselves too seriously and we lose touch with our inner child.

But, look at how much fun we had dressing up today! Look at how it made us smile, laugh, and brought us joy. And God wants us to be filled with Joy. Our scripture in Job reminds us that: *“God will fill our mouths with laughter and our lips with shouts of joy.”*(Job 8:21)

Theologian C.S. Lewis, believes that play can provide a transcendental experience that connects us with joy. And for Lewis, JOY is with a capital ‘J’, because he believes that ‘Joy’ is the voice of God calling.

Lewis believes that play can become the avenue through which God communes with us; it can be a way in which we can experience the Holy in a vibrant and authentic way.

Of course play can come in many forms: listening to music, playing an instrument, reading a book, climbing a mountain, creating a craft, dressing up in crazy clothes ... It can be anything that transcends us beyond ourselves and helps us to connect the joyful nature of the sacred around us. Anything that brings us “JOY.”

I am reminded of Barbara Brown Taylor’s book [Altar in the World](#) that encourages reader to find and experience God in the world around us. This last week, in an inspirational message, I encouraged you all to be playful as we reflected on the playfulness of squirrels. I invited you to find things around that you brought you delight!

And, I am guessing that when you did that, then you were a step closer to experiencing the Joy that God wants for us.

Smiling, laughter, playing – they are all ways in which we can unite the body, the mind, and the Spirit:

- They help us to interact positively with those around us
- They help us take ourselves less seriously
- They can diffuse us in moments of anger
- They can dissuade us from always wanting to have all the answers
- They can encourage us to live in the moment
- They can have the healing power of relieving our stress and anxiety

And, most importantly,

- They can bring us hope and Joy

We celebrate Holy Humour Sunday today because we recognize that God wants all these things for us. And perhaps now, more than ever, we need to be reminded of the hope and Joy that God gives us.

I want to end with a quote from C.S.Lewis – he writes:

“It is through our personal experience with Jesus Christ, that we can fully actualize Joy.”

So, today, and always, may you seek ways to walk and dance with Christ, be filled with delight, and be healed with Joy.

Amen.