

Today is a little different Sunday as we have a summer vacation interlude from the fruits of the spirit- our summer sermon series- which will continue next week. Those have kind of been the ingredients of a life of faithfulness- today I'm going to stir them together into a recipe.

**Sermon: Joy Complete**  
Philippians 2:1-5

We search for joy. As Pastor Bill talked about during the fruit of the spirit 'joy'- it's not about happiness. It's not about an Almond Joy candy bar, or Joy dishwashing soap. As William Shakespeare once said, "Joy lies in the doing."  
But, if joy lies in the doing- doing what?

We know the song- Joy to the World, the Lord is come,... the Savior reigns.  
**That** informs us about where our joy comes from.

I went to the North GA United Methodist annual conference last month in Athens. It is where pastors and lay leaders and other members of all the United Methodist churches in North GA gather for days of discussing, hearing reports, voting, and worshipping- continuing the work of the church. The days are both tiring and uplifting. While I was there this year I went to the prayer room which had a labyrinth to walk.

Now a labyrinth is an ancient, contemplative experience-( there is a picture of one on the front of your bulletin.) It can be located inside or outside- made of plants, or gravel, or painted or paint on canvas as this one was.

A L is not a maze. There is only one way- usually you follow the path into the middle, and then turn around and follow it back out. It is a time you can use for prayer or meditation or contemplation. Maybe about a verse, or a problem you're facing.

Now, a maze has choices, you can make a wrong turn or get lost, or not find where you are going.

But in a L, if you keep on the path you will get there.

There are 180d turns, sometimes turns away from the center where you feel like you might not be going in the right direction or you're not making progress.

But if you stay on the path, you will get there.

A labyrinth is a path. I want to tell you a bit about the path I am on that got me here- so that you get to know a little better.

A path of joy.

About 13 years ago I joined a UMC- Hickory Flat UMC, not too far down the road in Cherokee County- to find a church in the community where we lived, so that my then teenage daughter would know others and be more interested in youth group. The pastor there was Herzen Andone- and through the sermons I heard and people I met and things I did, I learned to be a more faithful person- **I found joy**.

I liked the theology of the United Methodist church- that God has intention to save all people, and that God is at work for that end- allowing us to say yes or no to the invitation.

This church is not about rules and laws but about transformation through Jesus- responding to Jesus' instruction to care for others and love your neighbor.  
This church has strong traditions and history- but is willing to do new things.

I became a part of that church- as a servant and a leader-**a joy**  
-Stephen Ministry, prayer team, mission teams, finance,  
At significant things for me:

Disciple Bible study, like we have right here at this church, where I found the Bible to be a living book showing me how to live  
At that church the Associate pastor preached a sermon about the verse Ps 51- Create in me a new heart- led to reading the Psalms- instead of being boring, I found they were full of real life- joy and anger, judgment, questioning, mercy, wars and singing- try it- if you read one a day, you will cover them all in about 5 months!

Mission trips to Mexico

-learning to become obedient as I watched other become obedient- watching God work through people to serve others- as they provided medical care, food, Bible school for the children and worshipped together with people who - though they spoke another language were saved by the same loving Jesus.

I saw God works as God works,

In 2004 I went on mission planning trip, and part of a devotion included this verse, again from Psalm 51- Let me hear joy and gladness, let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

This preceded my trip to Italy. Let me tell you about this trip.

My son met his fiancé in So Ca, where he lived.

They decided to get married in Siena Italy. Our whole family went, and some of their friends. Erick rented an old castle for everyone to stay in for a week of fun and visiting and celebration. We got to Rome on Thursday. The wedding was to be on Tuesday in the beautiful city hall of Siena, under the Tuscan sun.

On Friday I slipped and fell on my hip. We were referred to the 'best' local hospital- the county hospital. I had a broken hip and needed surgery.

While I wanted to have it done right away, before the wedding- they said 'no' we don't do surgery on the weekend- I would have to wait til the beginning of the week.

I was admitted and put in traction with a heavy weight on my ankle to immobilize my leg- and I waited. My husband was allowed to visit me for the one hour visiting hour- twice a day. Other than that I laid alone, because of my inability to communicate -they didn't speak English- and I -certainly couldn't speak Italian. They gave me pain medication, and were kind but I was essentially alone and sad!

But lying there alone, I felt the presence of God comforting me. I realized that whatever happened God would be with me. "Let me hear joy and gladness."

As that weekend was coming to the end, I became concerned about having surgery there. The medical care did not seem to be what I was accustomed to. I thought there was a good possibility, if they put me to sleep for surgery, there would be a complication, that I could die, or that there would be an infection requiring a prolonged hospital stay.

By Sunday hearing nothing about surgery for the following day, I asked a nurse about the plan- using my high school French. She left to find out and came back saying, in her high school French, - surgery- not Mon, not Tuesday, maybe Wed, not Thurs, maybe Fri.

The long and short of the story- a woman I call an angel, a messenger sent from God, working there as a research nurse, came in Monday morning, speaking English - and asked if we had insurance. Saying 'yes' she told us we didn't want to have surgery there and made the transfer to an outstanding clinic- **joy**

I had uneventful surgery on Wed, the day after my son's wedding, which I listened to by cell phone.

This was a sad experience- but a formative one for me. As I considered life and death, and who I was without others around me, I realized God's constant presence- I will not be afraid-in life or death, in plenty or scarcity, **I can have joy**

God did not cause that broken bone,  
but God used this event to help me grow in faith.

I came back to the states, continued my PT, and recovered well.

A year later I developed a spiritual unrest. It's hard to describe-

Was I doing too much or too little?

Did I need to spend more time 'being' or more 'doing.'

I prayed, and thought, read scripture- and what came to me was-

'Take two classes at Candler'- not an actual voice, but an assurance of what I should do:

maybe I would learn something for a ministry I was to be involved in,  
maybe I would meet someone I needed to talk to- who knows?

God knew and God had a plan that would unfold over the next years.

Jer 29:11 For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not to harm, to give you a future with hope.

I took those two classes, then two more- feeling a certainty (**joy**) that this was the right path.

The following year I understood that God was calling me to be a pastor in the United Methodist Church.

This was not part of my plan.

Life was good.

I was working as a neonatal nurse practitioner- I was happy where I was, liked my job.

Being a pastor-

This was not what I signed up for.

I wrestled with this- I was not the right person, I was too old, I don't have the right skills. And God listened and waited. And God listened and waited as I would bring it up again and again. I finally felt like God was saying, "Are you done yet?"

People ask me-

*Have you always wanted to be a pastor-*

*My answer: I had never wanted to be, never considered*

*I know this is not theologically correct but I think there must be a pew at Hickory Flat UMC with an X under the seat. God chose whoever sat on that pew to be a pastor. I sat there on that marked seat- and God said you- yes you. That's why God chose me- I sat on the X that marked the spot. God can use anyone.*

What did my family think?

*Dennis, my husband of 37 years, has been supportive through the whole process, but has counsel for anyone whose spouse mentions taking 2 classes: you have no idea- no idea what you are getting into- though it seems so innocent, so harmless - try to divert, offer a distraction- maybe a vacation- or a shopping trip or jewelry.*

*My Son?: told my one year old grandson- Seminary means Gramma loves Jesus - To which I had to yes-, but loving Jesus allows me to love Grayson more*

In saying yes to God: What this call would mean- willing to give up all- trusting God would be present and provide for what we were called to.

Saying yes to an uncertain future is like driving in the darkness- only being able to see the part of the road right in front of you, illumined by the headlights.

But if you feel God has asked you to do something- what is the choice besides saying 'yes'?

God provided assurances: **joy**

Because I worked for Emory University, I not only had a good salary and schedule, but I had a scholarship that covering most of the tuition of those first few classes.

After I made this new commitment to God- I got a call from financial aid at school offering me additional tuition funds- allowing me to increase my course load and finish school without school debt.

And Dennis, working as Medical Health Response director for state of GA: offered a position from a private company with a bigger salary, with his office in our house.

In my second year of school I was required to find a church to serve at for a contextual experience. I found Northbrook UMC and my supervisor was- Martha Fielden. Many of

you remember her fondly as associate pastor here for 10 years. Back then, before I had ever heard of Sam Jones, I could tell she loved this place.

I attended Candler School of Theology- founded as a Methodist school, part of Emory University, receiving my MDiv last year.

During my last year of school I worked with a mentored group as part of the process to become a pastor. The mentor of this group was- Bill Burch.

And now, Now Here I am- at Sam Jones UMC-  
with Herzen Andone- the new District Superintendent of our Northwest District,  
Bill as the senior pastor I work with  
and Martha as predecessor and colleague in ministry.

Now being here in this place- with all of you- I can say my joy is complete.

Not completed, not finished- but ongoing.

This joy did not start here, and it will not end here.

But it is here.

Joy is not a thing but an action

And that is what God offers to each of us.

Not ease or happiness- but constant presence.

In the middle of broken bones or exhaustion.

In the middle of discouragement or need

God can use where you are.

If you reread our passage for today, you realize that Paul's joy was complete not only because of his own relationship with Jesus, but as part of a community of faith.

Our joy is complete together.

I don't want you to look now- but there is an X under your seat. God is calling you.

Maybe not to be a pastor- maybe to be a teacher, or an encourager, or an administrator or a singer or a prayer. Or maybe to be a pastor.

Pastor Bill spoke last week about how you run a race and how you become faithful- one step at a time. Commit to prayer, studying scripture; join a Sunday school class or a Bible study.

It is like a labyrinth: you stay on the path. Sometimes it doesn't seem like you make progress. But keep your eyes on Jesus. You will get to him. Your joy will be complete. And someday- our joy will be **completed**- when we all see Jesus face to face. A great cloud of witnesses. When God's kingdom comes to earth and we are immersed in love and joy and there is no sickness, no stress, no sin, no death. We will live with God forever.

Now- to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine- to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generation forever and forever. Amen

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