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| Slide | **Sermon** |
| 1 | **Gift of Joy**  Isaiah 40:1-11; Mark 1:1-8 |
| 2 | Small Tanzanian school in Africa had to be closed—why? Because of an outbreak of a rare disease.  Symptoms were uncontrollable shouting, laughing and crying.  28 students came down with what has been called the Laughing disease.  What makes you laugh? Here are some one liners that I think are funny—I get a chuckle from them  o Some people are kind, polite and sweet-spirited—until you try to sit in their pews.   * The good Lord didn’t create anything without a purpose, but mosquitoes come close. * People are funny, they want the front of the bus, the middle of the road, and the back of the church. * Quit griping about your church; if it was perfect, you couldn’t belong. * Some mistakes are too much fun to only make once. * We could learn a lot from crayons: some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull, some have weird names, and all are different colors, but they all have to learn to live in the same box. * How long a minute is depends on what side of the bathroom door you’re on.. * If ignorance is bliss, why aren’t more people happy? |
| 3 | Christmas is a time of laughing, rejoicing, and smiles of good will.  It’s easy to get caught up in the “spirit of Christmas” for most people   * Lots of preparations—decorations, gift buying, helping others * Lots of anticipation—getting together with your Covid family and friends, family sharing meals with those few, giving & receiving presents, although this year doing them through Amazon, Fed Ex or UPs or USPS and for Santa Claus * Lots of diversions from the routine of the normal everyday stuff   Christmas time: one of the greatest parts is that it tends to be contagious and even Ole Scrooge’s icy heart melts; even the Grinch’s heart grows 3 sizes |
| 4 | Our whole society gets caught up in the happiness and joy of Christmas; you might say our society gets the Laughing disease!  Albeit for different reasons—What makes you happy?   * Some are happy for the huge shot it gives the economy—for some stores live by the holiday spending * Some are happy because the family gathers in * Some are happy because they get vacation time * Some are happy because they get to eat a lot   (Pause)  What makes you the happiest during the holiday season? |
| 5 | Yet at the same time, for many, the Christmas holiday season is one of the most stressful, unhappy times. Stressful—because we try to do and be too much!  You know folks:  Maria lost her husband to cancer last week. She can’t bear to think of the coming weeks. Each present wrapped, each gathering planned only points to her husband’s absence  Robert lives alone on his family’s farm. He’s the only one left. Christmas used to be a rip-roaring time. But now it’s hardly any different than Dec. 26th or 28th or Jan. 10th.  It’s said that Christmas is 2nd only to Spring time in the high rate of suicide attempts. There’s a greater gap between the sad and the happy. |
| 6 | Yet—Advent and Christmas is a season that should repel any sadness, any unhappiness. It is a time when we should feel a deep and profound sense of joy.  Why, then are we so up and down at Christmas? Why are most people on an emotional roller coaster during the holidays?  Why? It’s because we confuse happiness & joy  **(Repeat)** |
| 7 | Isaiah 40:1-11 helps us realize the difference between joy & happiness. [Read Text]  “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. **2**Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.**3**A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. **4**Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. **5**Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” **6**A voice says, “Cry out!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. **7**The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. **8**The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. **9**Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” **10**See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. **11**He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.”   * Comfort Comfort * hard service has been completed * Path is being prepared for return home * God’s glory will be revealed * People are like grass & flowers—will fade but God, God stands forever * In God are good tidings, steadfastness, reward, a “Good Shepherd” |
| 8 | Here we have a chapter out of Israel’s history—the conclusion of a dark, dark chapter:   1. Had turned away from God, worshiped other gods 2. Hard hearted, refused to change 3. Swept out their land and taken thousands of miles from home to Babylon and held captive 70 years |
| 9 | Before the fall and exile they were happy, confident that no nation could touch them. But when Babylon came there was devastation, weeping.  But now they move to joy.  I say joy not happiness because they are still in captivity—nothing’s changed; except they now have a promise.  A promise that God was going to act on their behalf—  And with that promise came joy |
| 10 | You see happiness is emotion based on circumstance  [When things are going well, life is good, we’re happy. When circumstances change and things go badly, then we’re sad]  But joy doesn’t work that way. Joy is not circumstantial. Real joy is based in faith.  Israel could now have joy knowing that no matter the circumstance, God was there!  The same is true for us today—no matter the circumstance we can have joy if we have faith.  Happiness is based on what is happening *AROUND* us. Joy is based on what is happening *WITHIN* us.  This is so important for us because as we approach this Christmas season, for many the feeling of exile and imprisonment will be present. |
| 11 | 1. **Economic:** many will not be able to do as much for their kids as they’d like and as the TV commercials demand.    * For some 2 jobs hardly make ends meet.    * For some hospital/doctor bills drain their savings.    * For many the COVID virus keeps us trapped at home.   Many will know Israel’s helplessness this Christmas—shall we despair?  Also, singing as usual will only be done at home, not in the church.   1. **Spiritual Exile:**    * Bible just seems so irrelevant; wordy, archaic    * Can’t find time to pray and stop enough to listen    * Not sure God cares anymore    * Question why does God let all this stuff happen   Many know how Israel felt when God seemed so far away.  Shall we despair?   1. **Personal Exile:**    * Doctor says your report showed cancer    * Husband and wife see the worst in each other instead of the best they saw on the wedding day    * Sons and daughters are running with the wrong crowd   Many of our society are exiled from the very ones they should be close to.  Shall we despair?  Yes, they will despair, yes we will despair if they have no hope, no faith.  Faith, Hope and Charity (Love) remain…brings a smile, doesn’t it? |
| 12 | What does a smile cost? It cost nothing but creates much. It enriches those who receive it. Without impoverishing those who give it.  It happens in a flash, and the memory of it sometimes lasts forever.  None are so rich that they can get along without it and none are so poor but are richer for it’s benefits.  It fosters good will in a business,  It creates happiness in the home,  And is the countersign of friends.  It is rest to the weary,  Daylight to the discouraged,  Sunshine to the sad  And nature’s best antidote for trouble. |
| 13 | Sorrows and troubles can bring despair. Yet, those who know God’s gift of joy in Christ can have hope and move forward in Christ, we can still know joy even when the outward circumstance is tough.   1. Mary had great joy in Christ birth even though in a dirty stable and unmarried. 2. Joseph had great joy even though he wasn’t the father and he had to lead his family to Egypt. 3. Hebrews knew great joy even in exile. 4. Wisemen had great joy following the star and finding Jesus even though—some say it took 2 years!—On camels and walking and camping out |
| 14 | We can have joy in our darkest hour if we accept God’s gift of joy—Jesus!  Thanks be to God for His indescribable Gift! of Joy! |
| 15 | I want to share a story by an Unknown Author called The Road of Life , which is found in the book, "Holy Sweat", by Tim Hansel.  At first, I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die. He was out there sort of like a president. I recognized His picture when I saw it, but I really didn’t know Him. But later on when I met Christ, it seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that Christ was in the back helping me pedal. I don’t know just when it was He suggested we change places, but life has not been the same since.  When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring, but predictable, it was the shortest distance between two points. But when He took the lead, He knew delightful long cuts, up mountains and through rocky places at breakneck speeds. It was all I could do to hang on!  Even though it looked like madness, He said, “Pedal!” I worried and was anxious and asked, “Where are you taking me?” He laughed and didn’t answer, and I started to learn to trust. I forgot my boring life, the troubles hurt less, and entered into the adventure, and when I’d say, “I’m scared,” he’d lean back and touch my hand. I gained hope, love, peace and joy—gifts to take on my journey, My Lord’s and mine. And we were off again.  He said, “Give the gifts away. They’re extra baggage, too much weight.” So, I did, to the people we met, and I found that in giving, I received, and still our burden was light and joy filled my life.  I did not trust Him, at first, in control of my life. I thought He’d wreck it; but he knows bike secrets, knows how to make it bend to take sharp corners, knows how to jump to clear high rocks, knows how to fly to shorten, scary passages. And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places, and I’m beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant companion, Jesus Christ.  And when I’m sure I just can’t do it anymore, He just smiles and says… “Pedal.”  Riding in Tandem means keeping pace with Christ -notice (on the slide) the feet are positioned exactly the same. |
| 16 | I want to close with part of a poem written by Pastor Connie Ciccone called God Always Sends Rainbows After The Rain  Whatever your cross  Whatever your pain  There will always be sunshine  After the rain.  Perhaps you may stumble  Perhaps even fall  But God’s always there  To help you through it all. |
| 17 | Whatever your challenge  Whatever your Christmas toy  Let the Bethlehem star  Lead you to God’s real joy  Isn't exciting to think that God has such Joy waiting for you this Christmas! I hope you will receive it and get on that tandem bike God has waiting for you! Amen |
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