



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### THE SHEER JOY OF JESUS

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~ Scripture: John 16:16-22 ~

*John 16:20 "I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. [His disciples will weep when they see him crucified. But look at the world...what an indictment!] You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. 21 A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. 22 So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy."*

*Hebrews 12:2 "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Jesus was literally one of us. 100% God, 100% human. Even though we usually have this plastic Jesus who wasn't really real when we approach Him, we just need to read the Gospels to see how His emotional life was threaded through the accounts of His life and we will see, He was far more human in his emotional life than many of us are. He felt life deeply, good and bad.

But today's Easter. I really struggled finding the right emotion for Jesus on His resurrection. How did He feel? My first word was "Surprise!" I also thought about the awe of Jesus on that day, or the hope of Jesus. I'm sure He had many, many emotions on that day, including "I told you so!" But underlying each of those emotions is the emotion of joy. The Bible says in James that we can even count our *trials* as joy, that we may be perfect and complete.

Jesus *lived* joy, even in his times of loneliness and frustration, anger and sorrow. I think He got such a kick out of life, being 100% human, and He felt joy a lot. Funny things happen in His teachings and parables and His healings, even in His confronting the establishment of His day. Even when the crowds were driving him crazy. Even when He saw people hurting themselves and others. He got angry; but never lost His perspective. Even when the disciples were driving Him crazy (What do you *mean* after 3 years you still don't know who I am!). Jesus got frustrated, but He never lost His joy.

How is that possible? How could Jesus face all the things wrong with His world, hold on to joy, and still be emotionally real? How can you and I, living in a world with so many exciting, significant and crazy things happening still feel joy, even when much of what is happening seems to be moving in the wrong direction? It's *not* because Jesus turned a blind eye to human pain and suffering.

It's because joy, sheer joy, comes from nothing more than an act of love being completed. Love, when it's completed, looks like and feels like joy. And Jesus said "*Greater love has no one than this; that you lay down your life for your friends.*" John 15:13. And now, He's done it. In the resurrection, Jesus saw His love completed. It involved Him choosing to give up His life in shameful, painful, agonizing death for our sakes. And when it was over, there was nothing left but joy; because He had seen His love all the way through.

How many people in the world today never experience joy because they've never even heard of this kind of love? They've *never* been loved all the way through, let alone even *seen* it.

This church has been here for 175 years and is here today because people need to know about the God of resurrection and new life! The God who keeps walking, even when it's a dead end. The God who experienced everything you're going through—Loneliness. Sorrow. Anger. Frustration. Fear. Passion. He's been there. He lived it...to the point of death. Jesus saw it all the way through. WHY? Look what the Scripture says. It wasn't for love that He did it. But "*For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" Hebrews 12:2. Joy is love seen all the way through!

**Joy is love seen-through.** That's why the resurrection is sheer joy. Because love has won out—*all the way through*. Joy is what happens when we've seen love through to its consummation. Joy. Sheer joy. Love completed. Victory!

Scripture says you can even count the tough times as joy, because you know it's a part of getting there. I think Jesus must have done that, even as He was frustrated, and angry, and lonely, and sad. We've talked about how Jesus must have cracked up telling his friends about some of the crazy stuff along the way:

- "Mom drives me *crazy!* I'm trying to be just a *guest* at this wedding. I'm sitting there, and Mom practically stops the whole party and says "Do whatever he says." And she wants me to turn all this water into wine, and it wasn't even time to begin my ministry..." Frustrating for Him, but funny, too.
- Or "We're there teaching with like 5,000 people, and nobody brings anything to eat. Duh! So Dad and I have to do the whole bread in the wilderness thing..."

Being human must have been just funny for Jesus. Imagine Jesus, the One through whom all things were made, having to walk around...on feet? Or falling asleep? Or jumbling his words sometimes, because He gets tongue tied? In the midst of all those oh-so human

emotions Jesus was going through, there's this sense of joy, because it's part of God's plan to see love through.

**It was for JOY Jesus got messed up.** And got messy. It was for JOY He went through bitter agony. For the SHEER JOY of God, His love was seen through to the end. Every price was paid for every human being in history to be made right with God again. And there was nothing left but *joy*. Was it a pain in the neck to live for God? You bet! Is it a pain today? You bet! *Life's* a pain! Was it a pain in the neck for Jesus to challenge the religious leaders and the status quo? Yes. Is it a pain in the neck to challenge the status quo of what everyone else thinks and does today? Yes. Is it a pain to change your direction today? You bet! It's a risk to be a part of a church that's seeking to stop playing church and start living it out. Seeing love *all the way through* will cost you something. It cost Jesus His life. But Jesus himself promises that *that joy* can't be taken away. And it's only in *that* kind of joy that you'll experience a resurrection power like you've never seen. You have to risk joy. But the benefits are huge.

**So why *don't* we live joy like that?** Maybe it's the cost. We just can't *believe* that's what it takes. (To give up MY life?) It's so counter-intuitive... Another reason we don't live joy like that because all we see is a dead end. Like the women coming to anoint Jesus' body in the tomb after he was killed. The Sabbath was over. They had bought spices. They went to Dexter Pharmacy to the death spices aisle. Cinnamon, myrrh. This is what you *do* to care for the body that you loved, one last time. The minute it was dawn, they rushed to the tomb. Why did they go? Because they loved him. This was the tomb of their best friend. They know what they're going to find. They were there all Friday. They know they're going to find the hands that touched the lepers. They know there are going to be holes. It's going to be a terrible sight. They know his face is going to be disfigured. They know they'll have to peel off the linen. They *watched* them peel him off of the wood. They're not talking about "how are we going to handle his hair matted down." They've come with sponges and cloth to wash him. *They* don't want him in the rubbish dump, like the other crucified people. *Their* anxiety is about the stone. The stone is a dead thing. You can't bribe the stone. It's heavy. You can't talk to it. In their sorrow and fear, they only ask "*Who will roll the stone away?*"

It's hard when all you see is a dead end. What's your stone? And you're blind to the resurrection power waiting for you. It's hard to go against the flow. But when it's for God's sake, God does something CRAZY. God goes beyond the dead end. God goes beyond your human limitations. God goes beyond *the grave*. Matthew says "*the angel rolled away the stone...and sat on it!*" Matthew 28:2. How's that for joy? ☺

Joy is big. The truth is, all of us, **every one of us seeks happiness or joy**. Every person, every dictator, every farmer, every philosopher, every teacher, every philanthropist, every mom, by whatever means you employ. For joy or happiness, some go to war, some avoid it. It is the motive of every action of every man and woman; even people who are miserable. They wouldn't say it like that. They'd say something like "I hurt so bad...I don't think it could get any worse...I'm going to end it." But beware, because **ending pain is very close to seeking happiness**. Jesus pursued joy. It's not shallow. The Bible

says astonishing things about joy. Listen to these verses I once heard Rev. John Piper highlight...

- Jesus' aim in all he taught was to bring joy to his people. John 15:11. *"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."*
- Joy is what God fills us with when we trust in Him. Rom. 15:13 *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing."*
- The Kingdom of God is joy in the Holy Spirit. Rom 14:17 *"Not a matter of eating and drinking...but of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."*
- The joy of God is the Fruit, or the results, of His Spirit. Gal. 5:22
- Joy is the aim of everything the Biblical writers wrote and did. How crazy is this? 2 Cor. 1:24. *"Not that we lord it over your faith. We work with you for your joy."* Have you ever heard a pastor or a biblical author define his or her role this way? *"I work with you for your joy."*
- Becoming a Christian means finding a joy that is so satisfying you want to forsake everything else to have it. Listen to Jesus in Matthew 13:44 *"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. And in his joy sells everything he has and buys that field."* (That's self-denial). Take my car—there's a billion dollar treasure hidden in the field...take my life if I can have this treasure!
- Joy will overtake every sorrow for those who trust Jesus. Ps. 126:5 *"Those who sow in tears"* And some of you are coming this morning. You came with tears, with news or a weight on you so heavy you wonder if you will make it through this service this morning. *"Those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy!"* Ps. 30 *"Weeping may tarry for the night, but Joy comes with the morning."*
- The Bible sustains joy. Ps. 19:8 *"The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart."*
- God Himself is our joy. Ps. 43:4 *"I will go to the altar of God, to God, my exceeding joy..."* You make me know the path of life in Your presence is fullness of joy. In your right hand are pleasures forevermore."
- If your joy is in God, no one can take it away. John 16:22 *"You have sorrow now, Jesus said, but I will see you again. (that is I'm going to rise again); Your hearts will rejoice. And no one will be able to take your joy from you."* The world has all different kinds of happiness it commends to us. Advertising, TV, the net, and there's an element of satisfaction, but it will be taken away. All the advertised joys ended. When your loved one died, all the advertised joys ended, and he or she entered into the joy of the Master." The very joy of the living God.
- God is so big with his heart of joy, that he calls all the nations, all the peoples, all the homes. *"Let the nations be glad and sing for joy."* Ps. 67:4. 66:1 *"Shout for joy to God all the earth."* All of Dexter, all of Pinckney, all of Chelsea and Ann Arbor. All the campuses. All of Detroit. All the earth!" God is not ethno-centric in his joy. God is not liberal or conservative. God's joy is greater than all the earth and every issue facing us!!!
- The whole Christian message from the beginning of the incarnation to the end at the second coming is about joy. Remember Christmas? The angel's pronouncement is *"Fear not! Behold I bring you good news of great joy which*

*will be for all the peoples!" Luke 2:10. And the word from the Prophet Isaiah 51:11, speaking of the last day of earth say "The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy shall be on their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away!" It's the whole purpose of the message.*

And Jesus says it to you today, Easter of '08, just as he said to his disciples, *"I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."* 16:22.

**What if, this week, you risked joy?** What if you and I see love all the way through? Completing something for someone? Imagine what our world would look like if we made joy our major commodity, underlying all our actions and relationships and emotions? In that kind of joy, you would be building a lasting legacy, because no one, NO ONE will take that joy from you. It simply cannot be stopped, because God's love can never be stopped. God *is* love and Jesus is alive! God's love seen all the way through! NOW THAT'S JOY.