

## **061123 – Sermon - Outdoor Service and Picnic – Choose JOY!**

These days, it seems that everything we hear on the news is difficult – war in Eastern Europe, shootings in the USA, forest fires out of control in several parts of Canada... smoke in the air making us needing to wear masks again, rising prices and interest rates, politicians continually finding fault with each other...

It can all seem pretty depressing... but today, I choose to talk about joy. Just as we need good food, clean air, and fresh water to live, I think we also need joy. Some days finding it can seem really, really hard. When things seem really depressing, a lack of joy can make things even worse. Joy is that vitamin we need to live in hope, to motivate us to find solutions, and to keep us connected to each other, to the earth, and to our faith. One gloomy person can pull a whole roomful of people into despair – and one moment of joy can raise the spirits of everyone around them. The important thing to remember is this: there are always things around us that can spark joy – even in the darkest of circumstances. But sometimes we need to look for those things, we need to choose to find joy in our days.

Do you remember the videos of the little girl singing her heart out in a bomb shelter in Kiev at the beginning of the war last year? That one little voice and the smile on her face as she sang, helped everyone in that subway remember that life goes on, that good things are all around us if we take the time to look and if we take the time to share joyful moments with others. The joy that young girl's song gave that night raised the spirits of people all around the world as the video went viral – a bright light in a very dark place, enough to give a little break from the fear and enough to stir a little hope and determination in people's hearts.

Some things bring huge, obvious joy – like the birth of a baby, like a magnificent concert by a big orchestra, like fireworks on Canada Day, or the Santa Claus Parade... some joys like that are hard to miss -but other joys might be so small that you'd miss them completely if you weren't looking for them – a shiny pebble on the beach, the call of a cardinal outside your window, or a four leaf clover in the grass as you step out of your car. Even these little joys can change the course of a whole day.

We spend a lot of time in church studying ancient texts and wondering what lessons they have for us. We spend a lot of time talking about all the things we are expected to do as followers of Jesus. We spend time in meetings worrying about budgets and repairs to the building, and finding enough volunteers to get the work done. Sometimes, I think, even we people who are called to spread love to our neighbours, forget to do it with an attitude of joy.

Joy is contagious! To me, it might start small but can bubble up – it can go from a little smile to a full-blown belly-laugh. It can change a ho-hum day into a day to remember.

I like bubbles! They make me smile. Blowing bubbles on a summer day... bubbles in the bath... bubble gum... even bubbles in the sink make the job of doing the dishes just a little more fun... We have a Soda Stream machine at our house. You can buy lots of different flavourings to make

fancy drinks – but we never buy those. Our grandkids just love the way it turns an ordinary drink of water into something that feels like a party. All it takes is tiny bubbles to make even drinking water fun.

All it takes is tiny bubbles of joy to make every day a whole lot better.

We don't have many stories in the Bible about laughter – have you noticed that? And yet, I think Jesus was the kind of person who would laugh a lot. He loved meeting new people, he encouraged people to eat meals together – and how often do you have a dinner party where everyone is serious and somber throughout the whole meal? He didn't always give lectures, he taught by telling stories! Jesus liked children – and how can you be around kids and not find something to smile or laugh about? Most of the paintings and drawings we are familiar with seem to depict a serene and serious Jesus. I think perhaps we've all been missing something! Jesus had a huge mission and a serious message to share for sure, but I don't think he would have had so many followers if he was serious and gloomy all of the time. People wanted to be around him. He made them feel good – and I bet they laughed together too.

We have so many things around us that are cause for joy – especially in this faith community! Today is a celebration – of summer weather, of vacation-time beginning for many, and of our Sunday School and Youth Group. As the pandemic restrictions have slowly been lifting this year, we've been able to worship together as a family – and the children and youth have started to come back. I think we can celebrate that. It sure brings me joy! We have had wonderful music from both the adult choirs and the kids – and who can help but smile when we think about that youth-led service last week?

Speaking of Sunday School and Youth... I'd like to thank those who work hard to make sure our kids are involved in the life of this church – the Sunday School Teachers, Youth Coordinator, and Children's Choir Director. Sue Morrison, Johanna Burrows, Erin Berard, and Tamara Connors, please come up – and I'd also like to acknowledge Sarah Donaldson and Rick Morrison who take care of our littlest folk in the nursery....

So many joyful things happening at BCUC! So, today, let's choose joy! On your tables, you'll find some paper plates and markers or crayons. Please take one and write something on it that brings you joy, decorate it if you like... We'll use them for our Prayers of the People and then we'll string them together and hang them up.