Love God
Love Others
Share the Good News

SUMMIT CHURCH

Being Jesus Christ to the World

Theme: What Is God Thinking?

"Finding Joy in the Holiday Blues"

Jeff Huber, November 21-22, 2026, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verse:

> ***11 You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence, and the pleasures of living with you forever.*** Psalm 16:11

SLIDE Finding Joy in the Holiday Blues

I was visiting with someone this week whose house still has a lot of water around it, and I thought they would be lamenting approaching Thanksgiving and Christmas with so much uncertainty. I was surprised by their amazing attitude of gratefulness. They looked at me and said, "Well, the GREAT news is **I won't have to host** Thanksgiving dinner this year." I suggested we could get some boats to help get people to their place safely or even find another place to host it and she said, **"Don't you dare!"**

I think it was fun to have a little levity during the time of stress that many have been feeling as they dig out from floods and mud and water. I realized that the floods we have experienced have affected people in many ways in our community, but especially as we approach the holiday, what we know is that people can feel blue for lots of different reasons.

- According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 64% of people living with a mental illness report that their conditions worsen around the holidays.
- An American Psychological Association survey found that 89% of U.S. adults feel stressed during the holiday season, with 41% reporting higher stress than at other times of the year. High stress can trigger or worsen symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Financial pressure: Gift-giving, travel, and hosting costs often add strain.
- Loneliness and grief: Missing loved ones, feeling isolated, or contrasting your mood with perceived holiday joy can deepen sadness.
- Family dynamics and expectations: Strained relationships, hosting pressure, and social anxiety can take a toll.

What I realize over the many years of being a pastor is that the holiday season can bring this paradox where we are supposed to feel joy and be thankful and sing Christmas songs but at the same time can't feel a bit blue. It's important to know that there is a difference between Holiday Blues vs. Clinical or Seasonal Depression

- Holiday blues: Short-term stress, fatigue, or sadness tied to seasonal demands that usually ease once the holidays pass.
- Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD): A type of major depressive disorder with a seasonal pattern—typically starting in fall or winter with shorter daylight hours—that lasts longer and affects daily functioning.

Today we're going to talk about how the scriptures speak to us when we're struggling with either of these things because we find many biblical characters have these same struggles. Today we conclude this series of sermons in which we have talked about **suffering, natural disasters, unanswered prayers, the will of God, suicide, and where we find hope when life is dark. W**e have recognized **these are NOT God's**

will for our lives. **God is not willing tragic things** to happen in your life. God did not bring floods that forced almost 5000 people to be evacuated, some homes still **inaccessible** and **more than 150** homes that will never be livable again. Almost **no one had flood** insurance in these areas that have been devastated by the more than 20 inches of rain in a month. God doesn't bring these things so that God can make something good come from them. We don't talk about this being the will of God or say things like, **"God won't give you more than you can handle. Everything happens for a reason. It must be the will of God."**

I had someone this week reach out to me because they heard a sermon where a pastor did say that these floods were the will of God and that God is in control of all these things. They said that God was NOT like the people who follow the horses in the parade and picks up all the manure. I actually laughed at that metaphor because we believe in our tradition which focuses on free will and grace that God actually does come up behind us and pick up the manure because as a farmer once told me when I was serving a rural church in Iowa, **"In life, manure happens!"**

The other powerful part of that metaphor is to remember that manure is what fertilizes much of the food that we eat and so it has a use and a purpose. As a matter of fact, I learned recently when I was in Kansas that they take the 70 million tons of manure that comes from their cows each year into energy by capturing the methane released from the manure as it decomposes. Last week I showed you this cross that was made by brother Mel and was given to me as a gift that is made of recycled metal and talked about how God takes the broken and discarded pieces of our lives and can bring about something beautiful.

GRAPHIC **Cross by Brother Mel** (from last week)

If we can use manure for fertilizer and energy, I'm sure that God can use just about anything in our lives to bring about something

beautiful and we talked last week about how the worst thing is never the last thing and the promise of our faith is that at least to the best thing which is a relationship with Jesus that is meant to sustain us and into eternity.

Next weekend we begin the season of advent which is the four weekends before we get to Christmas and the coming of Christ into the world as an infant. The church has always used this time to remember also the second coming of Christ and it technically begins the new Christian year which was never January 1 which was the Roman calendar but always the first Sunday of advent. This is a great time to remember how Jesus talks about the coming Kingdom which he does in several places in the gospels, one of them in Luke 17 where we read these words.

BIBLE

20 One day the Pharisees asked Jesus, "When will the Kingdom of God come?"

Jesus replied, "The Kingdom of God can't be detected by visible signs. 21 You won't be able to say, 'Here it is!' or 'It's over there!' For the Kingdom of God is already among you."

Jesus then goes on to talk about all the signs that will happen when he returns and people get very worked up about all those things and if they're happening right now, but he also says not to worry about it because no one knows when that will happen. Instead, we are meant to remember that the Kingdom of God is already among us and especially as we enter this holiday season it's good to remember that joy is not about a set of circumstances that make us happy but is anchored in a relationship with the God who made us to love us.

GRAPHIC **Joyful Anyway Kate Bowler – Everything Happens for a Reason: and Other Lies I've Loved**

One of the books my wife and I read this year was joyful anyway

by Kate bowler which has become a New York Times bestseller. Doctor Bowler is a United Methodist Pastor and professor at Duke School of Divinity where she teaches students who are studying to be pastors. Her book is rooted in her own experience of surviving cancer as a young mother and how she was able to be joyful anyway, even during that experience. She also researches happiness and joy and teaches courses on that at the seminary.

She reminds us in the book that we humans are naturally creatures of habit. We like to know what is ahead and when we don't we get nervous and anxious or fearful. When things happen in life that we can't control or don't make sense, our nervous system tightens up. I saw that this week at the mobile home parks in which we had teams working when it began to sprinkle again and everybody's anxiety went through the roof. I was visiting with an older member of our church who lives near Junction Creek and is afraid to be at home because of fear that the water might rise again. When we are out of control and don't know how to fix something, we start to feel brittle and like we have an itch we can't scratch. When we don't know what's coming we feel out of order.

Psychologists have spent much time researching how it is humans need a sense of control and closure. There is a series of famous experiments where people were given simple tasks to complete, like a puzzle or maze. Half of the people were allowed to finish their projects and then they received a response of, “good job and well done.” The other half we're told in the middle of their work that they could not finish and so they took it all away from them. They thanked everyone for their time and told them they could leave because psychologists are evil and enjoy watching others suffer.

It reminds me of the horrible experiment where psychologists kept baby monkeys from their mothers that we learned about in psychology class to tell us what we already know which is that we humans need physical touch. I always thought that was the dumbest

experiment ever and cruel to those poor little baby monkeys. If you've been to my office, you may have seen the different monkeys that I have. I have several at home as well and I keep them as a reminder not to be cruel to people like those mean psychologists! But I digress.

What's interesting about that experiment is that the people who finish their puzzles forgot about them very quickly and couldn't even remember the puzzles they had done. When they were asked later, they barely remembered the experience. But the people who were interrupted did not enjoy the experience of being stopped and having unfinished puzzles. They also found that those people couldn't stop thinking about the puzzle later. In some versions of the study, the "interrupted people" we're up to 90% more likely to be deeply annoyed buy it up to one week later. They would mull it over every day and couldn't let it go.

Do you know why they did that? Because they're human and they're like the rest of us who constantly regurgitate things from our past when they didn't end up the way we wanted them to. Let's be honest, all of us have things we carry around with us and one of the reasons the holidays are difficult is because some of us have stories that are years or decades old with unresolved issues that we still carry with us! We love having a finished feeling where things are at peace and there is harmony. When we have that feeling of things being completed then we relax and we close the loop and we can calm down. It's the same idea for those of us who make lists and then check them all off and how good we feel after we've done that.

Then there are those of us like me who never do a written list but have them in our head which means that we are always adding to it, which is a whole different sermon from today. If you need another example of this, I would suggest that one of the reasons wordle has become so popular is because it's simple and it's short and when you're done with it you move on to the next one. Some of you can't go throughout your day without doing your wordle because it's the only

thing you feel like you completed that day. I'll never forget one holiday when our family was together when I was younger and we were playing a card game that we like to play and in the middle of it someone got frustrated and stood up and grabbed all the cards and threw them off the table. We had no way to complete the game, and you have never seen a more unhappy group of people sit down to dessert after Thanksgiving. Let's just say my family's a bit competitive. We must know who wins because then that finishes the game. There is a relief when the game is over and we can enjoy dessert Instead of wanting to throw it at the person who ended the game by destroying the cards! As you can tell, I have issues that get stirred up around the holidays just like everyone else.

GRAPHIC This-is-a-paradox

One of the reasons the Christian faith is challenging for us sometimes and why we need a savior in Jesus is because we want everything to be finished and tied up in a neat bow and yet faith and life are full of contradictions and paradoxes. A paradox is a statement or experience which appears to be a contradiction. It's something that we think can't be true. It looks like a self-contradictory sentence when we say it out loud. It's one of the reasons I have often taught you that the world of faith is more gray than it is black and white. Jesus and Paul both speak in paradox statements that make us uncomfortable. Let me give you a few examples.

BIBLE

> 33 **If you cling to your life, you will lose it, and if you let your life go, you will save it.** Luke 17

BIBLE

> 10b **For when I am weak, then I am strong.** 2 Corinthians 12

BIBLE

> 24 **Give freely and become more wealthy; be stingy and lose**

everything. Proverbs 11

BIBLE

16 **"So those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last."** Matthew 20

BIBLE

11 **The greatest among you must be a servant.** 12 **But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.** Matthew 23

And of course, there's that phrase in Luke's gospel we read earlier which is that the Kingdom of God is now and not yet according to Jesus. Wouldn't it make more sense for it just to be one of those things? I know some people read those and they wonder why God doesn't just pick a lane and stay in it. Whoever wants to save their life will save it. When I am weak, I am weak and when I am strong, I am strong. Give freely and become poor and lose everything. The first will be first and the last will be last. That's the way it works on the playground. The greatest is the one with the most servants of course because that's the way it works in the world. The Kingdom of God is here and now I can totally be off social media because it just doesn't matter anymore. Why did the Bible have to make things so confusing?

Being a follower of Jesus means we need to have a high tolerance for contradiction and unfinished business. We need to be able to accept that God is God and we are not. As much as we would like to be in control of not only our salvation but everyone else's, we are not. Salvation belongs to God and we can't earn it which also is a paradox because it is simply a gift that we say yes to and then we live into it because Jesus has done the work for us on the cross. None of us really like that if we're honest because it's out of our control.

The main paradox that I want us to wrestle with today is one that Kate writes about in her journey through cancer and that is the paradox

of joy. I don't think we can experience joy in the holiday season or continually throughout our lives unless we are willing to embrace a contradiction. She suggests in her book, and I would say we read about it in the scriptures that joy is not only a paradox, but it is a contradiction that can help us discover something about God and about ourselves when life is hard and difficult or unfinished. Kate talks about experiencing the miracle of joy in the midst I have a stage 4 cancer diagnosis when she was 35 with two young children. I appreciated her candor and honesty in the book because it's what I've experienced in some of the most painful moments of my life. She writes this about her experience.

> ***I was dying. Cancer was everywhere and I was terrified. I can't explain it to anybody, but I felt God's sticky, sweet love was being poured over everything in my life. It was like being in love with the world again. It was a world that was breaking my heart, but I couldn't gossip anymore. Everyone was beautiful suddenly and in a way I had never seen before. I stopped swearing, even though it came back later. A realization hit me and it became a motto which I said over and over again. It was the only thing that helped me make sense of what I was going through. Life is so beautiful and life is so hard. God was so real to me and yet was not solving any of my problems. It cracked me open to the world.***

I have had experiences like that in my life when I've been on retreats or alone in my room or sitting alone in the sanctuary before a funeral. It's as if everything comes together and falls apart at the same time and you realize that your only hope is God. What I have discovered is that these are moments, like when you have not had a shower for a week and that feeling when it pours over you for the first time. It feels great for about 15 minutes but then it wears off and we're left to dry off and continue the journey. As Kate reminded me in her book, **"These moments are not rewards for good behavior!"**

In my own life, these are the moments where I can feel that God truly does exist and as John Wesley said when he had this experience for the first time at the age of 35:

> **"I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."**

These were the words directly written by him in his diary and he would write several weeks later that he wasn't sure if God existed. John Wesley was a walking paradox because he would have these moments and then they would fade and he wondered where God was. It's probably why he would tell his discouraged pastors to **"preach faith until you have it."**

I want you to imagine Christmas Eve with me for a moment. I know it's a month away but if they can have everything out in Walmart and all the other stores then we can think about it in the church and it will be OK. We make everyone in the family wear red or green and we realize none of the kids' clothes fit but that's OK because it's going to be dark and no one will see it anyway. We put on our best clothes and dress up warmly and maybe prepare for snow if we're lucky and we come to worship. We sing Christmas songs and we hear the Christmas story, and we silently hope that we can get a good picture on Christmas Day to send out with a New Year's letter because we didn't have time to do a Christmas letter. We get to the end of the service, and we light the candles as every other light in the sanctuary goes out and then we sing, **"Silent night, holy night. All is calm all is bright."**

No matter what is happening in the world or in our lives, it all just fades away for a moment. We feel the overwhelming love of God and our soul cries, "Yes. It is good to be alive in this one ridiculous, beautiful moment." It is joy that is a gift from God and bubbles up from our gut because this is where the ancient church talked about the soul living.

The soul does not live in our head or in our heart but in our gut. The soul is very close to the craving for your favorite food sits like chocolate peppermint bark or toffee covered peanuts or sweet rolls right out of the oven with bacon on the side. I realize I just made some of you very hungry, but it will be OK. Joy will come.

The problem is that sometimes we want to feel joy, or we think we should feel joy, but we just don't. Sometimes that happens around the holidays for many of us. We look around at other people, and it seems like everyone else is experiencing joy, especially if we spend too much time on Facebook or TikTok or Instagram or whatever online platform makes you feel like you're missing out. We know that God is good and we believe that Jesus died for our sins on the cross and rose again and that the worst thing will never be the last thing, but we wake up on Christmas morning and we are not as excited as we were as a kid or we are carrying some heaviness.

Maybe we make the mistake of looking at our phone first thing on Christmas morning. For some, there is still floodwater and damage around us. We have the same unanswered prayers. We might be stuck in a relationship which is broken. Fresh grief or ancient grief might greet us in the morning and tears flow that we weren't expecting. We still don't have a job, or we are in one that makes us miserable. We still have a health issue that rears its ugly head every time there are rich foods provided at the table.

We are confused because we feel like we should feel better because Christmas Eve was just yesterday, but New Year's is coming and it feels like another failed resolution is around the corner. Am I not a faithful Christian because I can't feel the birth of Jesus even on Christmas Day? I must confess that I've been a Christian all my life that I can remember but there is a great secret that most of us carry deep inside if we're honest. Even though we have this great Christian tradition an amazing story about Jesus who was born in a miraculous way; who lived and taught and healed a beautiful life; and who was

betrayed and suffered and died a gruesome death on a cross; who rose again to live for us and show us that the worst thing is never the lasting; I am not always happy. I'm a pastor and I feel like I should be happy all the time, but I'm not. I realize that some of you are shocked, but it is true. The Dirty little secret for most of us Christians is that we are not happy all the time.

The challenge is that we live in a world that tells us we should be happy all the time. What I know is that there is enormous cultural and spiritual pressure to feel happy all the time. The debate has been settled on your social media feed. Yes, you can be happy all of the time. In fact, if you pay attention online, other Christians are living an effortless and happy and beautiful life that you are missing out on because you don't have enough faith I guess? Their lives are fulfilling and joyful and we should be embarrassed that we haven't joined them already.

Here's the list of how to easily be happy according to the most recent messages.

- Use this beauty product and hide your age.
- Have the best winter plans.
- Have the best summer plans.
- Did you get everyone the perfect Christmas present on Black Friday to get the best deals?
- Did you get your gym membership updated or renewed or start 1 so you can have a beach body by the time spring hits.
- Here are 15 ways to make your relationship perfect.
- Here are 15 signs you should break up so that you can find the perfect relationship.
- Here are the 15 things you should look for in the perfect relationship that no doubt will come your way in the new year.
- Have your time with God every morning because all the

perfect Christians do.

- Be sure to back up your photos on the cloud and on a separate hard drive to make sure you don't lose every single memory.
- Picture the perfect life and it can be yours.

There is this intense emotional and spiritual pressure to be happy because we live in a society which tells us that we have no limits and we can have it all. We can have health and wealth and happiness if we just follow these 15 steps. Our culture continually informs us about how we can build a happy life from the Puritans of New England to Benjamin Franklin to the rise of self-help books which take up most of the Bestseller list to now digital podcast that we can listen to every day and find our perfect life. We have become the number one consumers of how to build a happy life and we even find it in the church where sometimes I fall into the trap of giving you three things that we can do to change our circumstances. Many times, we are told that everything is possible if we will just master our emotions and be happy. There was even a song that was super popular that keeps being redone by different people in every decade it seems like.

SLIDE "Don't Worry, Be Happy!"

Recent bestselling books are:

- The Happiness Advantage
- How Happiness Happens
- The Happiness Equation
- The Courage to be Happy
- The Happy Inbox
- The Happy Hour
- Happiness Hacks
- Happiness is a Choice

The idea is that we can all achieve this blissful state if we just buy the right book or take the right steps or pay the right amount to a

coach. I discovered that you could hire a happiness coach. And it's not just a person but a really nice bus with couches and video games and a dance floor.

GRAPHIC Happy Coach

We continue to buy into this idea that if we're struggling with being happy it must be low self-esteem or some other personal problem we need to solve. We are inundated with stories about how there are no setbacks but simply setups for the next moment of success. Apparently, God doesn't close doors but really opens windows. If something looks bad on the outside, then we just need to work harder on our mindset. Happiness is a choice and we can read an entire book on how to make that choice. We just need the courage to be happy, and we need the right equation to unlock the secret of happiness. We have many experts telling us why we should be better by now and be happier.

SLIDE Happiness is not joy

SLIDE *happ* = "luck," "chance," or "fortune"

Here is the biblical truth about happiness. Happiness is fine and it's nice and it's great if it happens to us. What we need to remember is that happiness is not the same as joy and we too often get that confused. Happiness, by its definition, is about good things happening to us which are nice and sometimes wonderful. The irony is that the word itself comes from the Old Norse word for chance or luck. Adding the suffix -y to hap formed happy, which originally meant "lucky" or "fortunate" in the late 14th century before shifting to mean glad or content. It might be helpful to remember that the same root is used in these words:

SLIDE happen, happenstance, hapless, haphazard.

SLIDE Happiness is what happens when things go our way and it often is hapless and haphazard and by happenstance.

This thing just happened. It happened by happenstance. We can even use them all in the same sentence. Your coffee is the right temperature. Your favorite song is on the radio. Your friend calls you at just the right time. You got a promotion at work. Nobody is fighting at home for 5 minutes. Your kid even compliments you on your way out the door. Things are Hunky Dory and you even won $5 on the lottery after spending only $1.00. Happiness is a feeling that we neurologically experience as ease or relaxing. It's almost like climbing a ladder and not worrying about falling off and being able to enjoy the view with each step that you go up.

Happiness is great and wonderful, but it is also very fragile. You can just as easily fall off the ladder. You could spend $100 because you won that $5 and did not win anything and then we became very unhappy. People can start fighting at the drop of a hat. Our teenagers can be critical of us the very next moment after a complement. Or even worse, the compliment is because they want something and then comes the ask. The coffee gets cold. The radio stops working. No one calls when you need it. You lose your job because of artificial intelligence or downsizing. The convertible we were driving to make us happy as sideswiped, and we end up in the hospital or worse.

This also explains why it's impossible to make someone else permanently happy, which is what we often try to do in our relationships. If happiness is based on happenstance and haphazardness, then it's easy for it all to fall apart. What would it take to make everyone happy all the time? It would be impossible! We can all fall into the trap of being a happiness manager and if you don't believe me then ask yourself how many times every day you try to help people have the right snack or make sure the temperature in the room is right or make sure people have what they need.

Happiness comes when 1000 tiny details match up and if we have it then it's a gift and it's wonderful. I do believe God loves for us to be happy and there's nothing wrong with it. The reality is that joy is

something different. Joy is not happiness. Joy is not the feeling that everything has been fixed. Joy is not happenstance or haphazard or hapless. Joy does not just happen. I love the way Kate defines it:

SLIDE ***Joy is a big and bright feeling that makes us feel temporarily whole*****.** –Kate Bowler

Joy can happen when we are sick and in the hospital. Joy can happen when we lose a child or a loved one. Joy can come to us in moments of heartbreak. Joy can come to us in fear and anger. We can feel God's gift of temporary and mysterious joy that brings us a sense of peace and wholeness. It is not happiness that we feel when things aren't going our way and yet we realize it will all be OK. Joy has an amazing ability to surprise us.

Joy hits our reward system when it washes over our brain as happiness does, but it also calms our stress system which helps us understand why we can't be happy and sad at the same time. We can experience joy and sadness, and we find that repeatedly in the scriptures. We can have this experience at a funeral where we can't possibly be happy, but we tell that one story about our loved one, and we begin to laugh and even giggle, and it becomes a joy filled moment. I'll never forget the moment of joy in a funeral when the grandson of the person who died who was only five years old walked up the steps where I was speaking and put his hand right on his grandfather's face which then pushed the flowers off the table making a very big mess. His mother was not happy, but we all laughed because it was a moment of joy, especially considering one of the stories that we told at the funeral what's about how grandfather was always spilling his drink towards the end of his life.

Joy can come to us from anywhere and as a gift and a surprise. It reminds us of how good it is to live deep inside of our lives and how we can be sad and have difficult moments around the holidays but know that a moment of joy may be just around the corner waiting for us. The

most difficult part of joy is that you cannot schedule it. You cannot earn joy. It is a gift and that is what I want you to remember on those days like Christmas morning when you wake up and don't feel happy. It's OK to not feel happy because the gift God gives us in the Christ child is described as joy.

Most of us can't fix our own lives and we certainly can't fix the lives of the people that we love. If we're not always happy, I want to give us permission to not feel like bad Christians, or unfaithful people who can't prove that Jesus is Lord with a huge smile on our face. What if we tried this holiday season to be joyful instead. Joy can be a relief when we have complicated feelings like anger or resentment or discouragement or sadness. Joy can enlarge our capacity for hope and gratitude and delight if we are willing to allow God to have that well up inside of us.

I want to suggest to you that many of us often, including myself, push joy out because we're trying to be happy. Sometimes I have found that it's embracing the unhappiness and the difficult moments and emotions of life that I find joy bursting in in ways I had never imagined. Joy is not fragile like happiness and doesn't depend on just the right circumstances. Joy can surprise us when life feels the most chaotic or frightening or unstable or out of control.

Understanding joy this way can help us understand more fully our faith and the nature and character of God. One of the reasons I tell you every week that you are made by God to be loved by God is that when we sit with that knowledge and feeling, we can find joy in the most difficult of circumstances because we know we're not alone and we know that God holds us and everything. The scriptures tell us that God enjoys us and we were created to walk in the garden and Jesus comes to restore the garden and paradise.

Joy is not the feeling that everything has been fixed. Joy is not happiness or resolution or emotional closure. We need joy that carries

us through all the hardship and sorrow. Scripture is honest with us when Jesus weeps at the tomb of Lazarus his close friend who has died, even knowing resurrection is coming. Paul speaks of a faith which is filled with sorrow and yet always rejoicing because of the presence of the Lord. Revelation speaks of a future where God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Those promises don't mean that we pretend we are not crying now. It is not joy instead of grief but joy with grief. It is not joy that rushes over all the hard stuff but one that is willing to sit in the brokenness and sorrow.

Joy does not require us to feel happy all the time and does not fix our sadness or disappointment. God gives us permission to love what we can and to mourn what we have lost. We trust that God is at work in ways we can't always see or understand. It is good news that joy is better than happiness which comes and goes. Joy is captured beautifully in Psalm 16 which also contains our memory verse for the week.

BIBLE

7 I will bless the Lord who guides me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
8 I know the Lord is always with me.
I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.

9 No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice.
My body rests in safety.
10 For you will not leave my soul among the dead
or allow your holy one to rot in the grave.

BIBLE

11 You will show me the way of life,
granting me the joy of your presence
and the pleasures of living with you forever.

I appreciate Kate's words:

SLIDE **Joy is about being honest and saying that life in this moment is hard; I am waiting; and God is still good**. –Kate Bowler

This is not because everything has changed but it's because that we know God came in this infant child who became a man and conquered death and let us know that the worst thing is never the last thing which leads to the best thing which is joy in the presence of a savior.

GRAPHIC **Happy Meal**

What I've learned is that happiness is nice, but we need joy. I found myself thinking about one of the ways our kids learn to be happy and that is with a Happy Meal from McDonald's. I want to be clear that I love happy meals and so do my kids, but I also learned something very important. If your kids are expecting a certain toy, then you should ask first before you order the Happy Meal. It can become very unhappy if you get the wrong toy. But here's another reality about the happy meal, which is a wonderful opportunity and way to feed your kids. Eventually the meal is eaten, and the toy gets lost or broken and ends up at the thrift shop and that moment of happiness is fleeting.

Yes, I did buy this happy meal, and it was fun and brought back great memories, especially of my son when he wanted to collect all the Power Rangers and especially the green one because he was that for Halloween. That memory was not about happiness but a little moment of joy even as I was thinking about it and putting it in my sermon for this weekend. It's a glimmer of the joy are children brought to us in those early years that are no longer with us but that we carry in our hearts and are still a gift from God.

Joy is deeper. Joy is for those of us whose prayers haven't always been answered. Joy is for those of us who have lived through suffering or who are in it right now. Joy is for those of us I have walked through deep heartache and loss like suicide. Joy is for those of us who are

willing to wrestle with the hard questions like the will of God and how it works in our lives. Joy is for those of us we have grief that washes over us when we wish we could just watch a movie.

The truth is that being a person of faith can be hard on our nervous systems because there is always a sense of mystery and uncertainty. The Kingdom of God is here and not yet. When we are weak, we are strong. Those who are first will be last and those who are last will be first. Christ was born and lived and died and rose again and we'll come again. Joy is the gift from God that helps us to live in the uncertainty and in times like the holiday season where we don't always feel happy, but what we really need is joy. I pray we might discover that joy in the days and weeks ahead.

Let's pray.

SLIDE Prayer

God of joy, give us the strength to live in the paradox of our faith which tells us the Kingdom of God is here and not yet. Our faith in Jesus reminds us that when we are weak, we are strong. Help us to remember that when we try to be first and to be happy all the time, we may find ourselves ending up last and lost. Most of all God, may we live as people who are willing to give our lives to you so that we might save them and experience your joy as you bring us peace and wholeness this holiday season. May we not be afraid because we know you are with us. ***You will show us the way of life, granting us the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever. In the name of your son Jesus,*** *Amen.*

November 21-22 Order

1. Countdown
2. Ryan welcomes people, inviting them to stand in body or spirit.
3. Song – "God So Loved"
4. Song – "Rest on Us"
5. Jeff welcomes and shares:
    A. QR Code
    B. Connect Card
    C. Invites people to greet each other
6. Sermon Video Intro
7. Sermon
8. Prayer
9. Med Moments
10. Offering (Flood Recovery)
11. (Possible Confirmation Video while students come forward)
12. Baptisms on Saturday; Confirmation on Sunday.
13. Song – "How Great Thou Art"
14. Prayer and Lord's Prayer
15. Care Ministers
16. The Bridge
17. Closing Prayer