

Sunday, August 8, 2021

May I come in...to the Rec Room?

(Message 8; Series: *My Heart, Christ's Home*)

(Colossians 3:23-24)

Scripture:

²³Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving (Colossians 3:23-24).

Message:

In Tim Hansel's wonderful book entitled, "When I Relax, I Feel Guilty," he writes,

"If I could live life over again, I'd try to make more mistakes next time; I would relax more; I would be sillier; I know of few things I would take as seriously.

I would take more trips; I would be crazier; I would climb more mountains, swim more rivers, and watch more sunsets. I would do more walking and looking; I would eat more ice cream and less beans!

You see, I am one of those people who live life prophylactically and sensibly hour after hour, day after day. Oh, I've had my moments, and if I could do it over again, I'd have more of them.

In fact, I'd try to have just moments, one after another, instead of living so many years ahead each day.

I've been one of those people who never go anywhere without a thermometer, a raincoat, aspirin and a parachute.

If I could do it over again, I would go more places, do more things, and travel lighter than I have. I would start going barefooted way earlier in the Spring until way later in the Fall. I would play hooky more; I wouldn't make such good grades - except by accident. I would ride on more merry-go-rounds. I'd pick more daises."

Robert Munger, in "My Heart, Christ's Home," pictures Jesus knocking on the door of our heart asking to come and live with us. So far in this series, we've looked at Jesus coming into our nursery; our study; our workroom; and our living, dining and bed rooms. This morning, Jesus wants to come into our **Rec Room** or play room.

Munger notes that he hoped Jesus would ignore this room and, along with it, whatever he did for fun in his leisure time. He admits he's not real comfortable sharing this room with Jesus.

Maybe, like many of us, it's because he has divided his life into two parts – his time for Jesus' part and his time for me part (i.e., his time without Jesus). That is, we have sacred time (worship service, devotions, small group, etc.) and secular time (baseball or football game, a movie, shopping, bar-hopping, etc.). Maybe it's because he never associated Jesus with **fun**, recreation, **pleasure** or simply having a good time. Or maybe it's because he's not comfortable with Jesus knowing what he **does there**.

Jesus calls him on his perspective: *"I thought when I came into your home, we were going to do **everything** together"* and *"You thought that with Me around you wouldn't have much fun, didn't you?"*

What kind of person deliberately leaves their best friend out of a significant part of their life? Or what kind of person does things and goes places knowing their family and friends wouldn't enjoy them?

Then Jesus reminds us he came so that *"his joy may be in us, and that our joy may be full"* (**John 15:11**).

THE PROBLEM

We tend to separate our recreation, pleasures, and leisure from God (and our faith). There is "for Him" and there is "for us." And we'd prefer to hide the behaviors, relationships and activities that are for us and may seem self-serving and might be deemed inappropriate.

Most Christ followers seem to have some things they'd like to keep hidden from God, some activities or thoughts we really don't want Jesus to see or know about.

But an equal, perhaps even greater, danger, is **compartmentalizing** our lives and relegating God into certain rooms and keeping him out of other rooms. We're okay with God in the foyer, the study, and maybe the living room. But we would prefer to keep God entirely out of our bedroom, our closets, and even our rec. room.

Many of us will shift gears shortly. After Church this morning, we'll go home. We have been to "church"; we've worshipped; we've prayed; we've spent time with God. Check! We've done our God time, now it's our time.

Now we can go home; relax; the rest of the day is ours. We can enjoy a good meal; spend time with family; take a nap; go for a walk or take a ride to the lake or on the lake. We can settle in with a good book; or plant ourselves in front of a screen. We gave God his time this morning; now it's my time!

Few of us will think about or notice how God might be present in all these things. **C.S. Lewis** reminds us, *“We concentrate on the pleasure of an event and we ignore the smell of deity that hangs in it.”*

The basic problem we encounter in the Rec Room is we often miss the connection between the joys and pleasures of life and the God who created these joys and invites us to enjoy them.

THE PREMISE

Consider the following three premises. Here is the first premise: Joy is (can be) one of the most powerful connectors to experience the presence of God.

When our son, Joel, was a preschooler, the doctor suggested he have tubes put in his ears. No parent likes to see their child go into surgery (even minor surgery) but we relented. In the car ride home, Joel wondered about the new “noises” he was hearing. We soon realized he had never heard traffic noises or birds singing or the wind through the trees.

When our son, Brian, was little, realizing his eyesight was poor; we had him fitted for glasses. When he first put them on, he saw trees had individual leaves, flowers were not just blotches of color; and the lawn was made of individual blades of grass. What was blurry and misunderstood suddenly became clear.

There are lots of ways we **learn** about the nature and presence of God. We read our Bibles, pray, and worship together. But if we limit our sense of God’s presence to our “religious” activities, we **miss** many of the amazing ways to experience God and his goodness because we don’t hear it or see it, or connect it to God.

Second Premise: we vastly underestimate the power of joy.

Isaiah, the prophet, notes that God is frustrated with His people. He shares God’s diagnosis: *“These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is made up only of rules...” (Isaiah 29:13).*

Then God offers his prescription to treat the disease of just going through the religious motions while the heart is unengaged. God says, *“Once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder.” (Isaiah 29:14).*

Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, a Jesuit theologian, said, *“Joy is the surest sign of the presence of God.”*

Steve Evans, one of my favorite Christian philosophers (I only know a few – and you’ll know why he is one of my favorites in just a moment) said: *“One of the best proofs for the existence of God is banana cream pie.”* (I think he meant

to say fresh peach pie; but we basically think alike). There are some very deep truths in his simple proposition.

We often fail to recognize some of the most powerful **evidence** for the presence (existence), power and goodness of God are things like: water and snow skiing, hitting a great tee shot on the first hole, the memory of your first kiss, diving into a pool on a hot day, or watching a sunset or the tide come in.

The presence of God exists deeply in the laughter we share with friends, seeing a deer run across 72nd on the way home from church; waiting for a mother and her ducklings to cross the road at Rivertown Parkway.

We see—if we pause to listen and observe—the nature and presence of God in the budding daffodils, a starlit night, a rainbow or a flash of lightening across the sky.

Eric Liddell, the English Runner turned China Missionary of *Chariots of Fire*: “*God made me fast. And when I run I feel his pleasure.*”

There is **no place** where—if our eyes and ears are open—we would not be **overwhelmed** by the presence, the power, and goodness of our God. When we fully understand that our only response is to worship Him. And like our mind’s eye runs up a sunbeam to the source (the sun), all of these things in our lives are threads to the presence, power, and goodness of our God.

Many churchgoers define their relationship with God by how angry or disappointed he might be in us; or by how guilty we feel...some of which might be appropriate (but that is incomplete). If we keep the joy in our lives separate from our understanding of God we distort our understanding of God, we short-circuit his goodness, and we diminish our relationship and our joy.

In our God-breathed world, every day is filled with moments and glimpses of God; if only we can see and hear them and attribute them to God. *I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. (Philemon 1:6)*

In the Old Testament, at least three or four times throughout the year, for small and big reasons, God would say: “*People, I’d like you to stop working; I’d like you to prepare an amazing feast of celebration that reflects my goodness and my blessing in your life. The feast should last for seven days.*” That is, stop working and simply enjoy me and my goodness. That is also the goal of Sabbath, the Sabbatical year, and Jubilee. That is the purpose of re-creation, laughter, and joy!

It is what the **Westminster Catechism** says is the chief end of man - “*To know God and enjoy him forever.*”

Third Premise: We forget *play* is an expression of **God’s presence in the world.**

Play is a God-given way to **release** the life-threatening **grip** of **busyness**, hurry, stress, and anxiety. Only sin allows play to become an escape, self-indulgence, and self-gratification.

On Saturdays, I often dress down (jeans, old shirt) (Six days a week, Marilyn serves as my “fashion police”; on Saturday I allow her to rest) (She was back on duty this morning!)

I do it purposefully to pull myself away from the busyness of the other six days. (Ever have the bank refuse to cash your check because you look worse than your driver’s license?)

I try to get in an hour walk at least four to five times a week; it helps slow my mind down. I cherish the times I’m not attending a meeting, writing a message, dealing with people’s issues and concerns, paying bills, running errands or doing chores.

As a result, I have a greater sense in my soul that He loves me and is full of joy toward me; sometimes it only lasts a few minutes but it is a remarkable connection that helps complete the picture of who God is.

We not only underestimate joy, we also underestimate the **power** of joy. We are not alone. God was constantly teaching and reminding his people about joy.

“Nehemiah said, ‘Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to the Lord. Do not grieve for the joy of the Lord is your strength. The Levites calmed all the people, saying, ‘Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve.’ Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.” (Nehemiah 8:10-12).

We’re told something powerful happens as we experience the joy of the Lord. It gives us **strength** (cf. **Nehemiah 8:10**); it enhances our perspective and grounds us deeper in **truth**. It sustains, nourishes, guides, and fills us. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit’s presence in our lives (cf. **Galatians 5:22**).

The Spirit enables us to walk boldly and fearlessly, knowing we are accompanied and empowered by God’s presence within us, even as we journey through the valleys and shadows of life. Giving ourselves the freedom to create, play and laugh brings restoration, healing, and joy.

Play and humor are effective tools for developing resilience, they help us relax and think more clearly; they can change our limbic (cerebral) response. They improve our ability to interact and connect with others.

I've had numerous moments: my wedding day; the births, baptisms, professions of faith and weddings of my three sons; alone in the Mohave Desert, hiking in the Tetons, wading in the pool of EnGedi; my ordination, standing atop the World Trade Center and months later standing alongside its crater; worshiping at Brooklyn Tabernacle; eating with Marilyn and sons on the beaches of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (actually, eating anywhere); and (almost) anytime with my grandchildren.

For a few minutes, you get lost in the moment - your heart so full of gratitude for the privilege of experiencing the presence, power and goodness of God in that moment.

In those awesome moments, we experience the strength of our Christian faith - joy is not just a momentary **aberration**, it is the **glimpse** of what life with Jesus will be like throughout **eternity**.

THE PRINCIPLE

Finally, we need to understand the **bedrock issue that underlies all of this.**

In Jesus' day, many laborers, field workers, carpenters, bricklayers were illiterate. Many had not been schooled beyond their elementary years.

In the Beth-sephar (the synagogue's elementary school), the primary educational goal was memorizing the Torah (i.e., the Books of Moses). At 12, the best students went on to Beth-midrash (middle school) to study the Prophets and Writings. All others went into the family trade. (You may remember, all the disciples had a trade).

Working under the hot Israel sun, they'd take water and food but also had a cloth (to wipe the sweat and dirt from their faces and arms) usually tossing it in a crumpled mess on the floor, re-using it day after day until the job was done.

Because they couldn't write an invoice or leave a note saying the job was done, they'd take the cloth and--instead of leaving it crumpled on the floor to signify they weren't finished and would be back—they would neatly fold it and lay it on top of their work to indicate to their boss or client that their work was done!

So, it is said, the sign a carpenter's (literally, a *tecton's*) work was finished became a (neatly) **folded cloth**.

In that context, listen to **John 20:3f (ESV)** - *"So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and*

went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen."

Jesus, THE carpenter, left his Father, his disciples, and you and me a sign: **a** (neatly) **folded cloth**. In a manner only a carpenter or *tecton* could, Jesus said, "My work is **done**. It's **finished**."

That is the bedrock, the foundation, of all our joy: The work is done. It is finished.

The deepest longing of our soul can again be connected with our holy and perfect creator God. The hard part is, as sinful people, we have no chance of ever making that happen by ourselves. But the hard part is done. The work has been done for us. Jesus did it.

That means that any work we do for Him is not to reconcile us to Him, it is simply our response to the work He has already done for us. He did the work of reconciliation. As a result, there can be joy in our relationship with God, joy in our work, joy in our serving, joy in our play, joy in our rest and recreation. We can experience joy as a way of understanding the presence and goodness of God. It is finished, the hard part is over. The work is done! Jesus has done it all for us. It is our time to rejoice!

We can experience His joy in a myriad of ways; so let's summarize:

- All real joy **emanates** from God. Joy is filled with joy; to know real joy is to know **God**.
- Joy **ushers** us into the **presence** of God. That is, joy takes us into God's presence—the heart and soul of our worship together.
- Joy **transforms** us. Joy is our **response** to who God is. (and)
- Without joy, we have no hope of really **knowing** God because our God is a God of Joy!

St. Augustine, an early church father prayed: "*The house of my soul, oh, God, is too small for You to come in. May it be enlarged by You.*" Augustine wanted his heart enlarged by joy so it would be big enough to hold more of God...and in doing so he joined the Psalmist who said, "*...together we celebrate your abundant goodness...*" (**Psalm 145:7**).

May God **surprise** you with His Joy over and over again – through a song, a sunrise or an amazing conversation, through running fast, a day in the woods, or a game of Uno with the grandkids - so that his presence will catch you off guard, take your breath away, and remind you of his **presence**, his power and his **goodness**!

Prayer: Into My Heart

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