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Oct

Rejoice in the Lord!

Pressing On

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

Joy gives us sustenance to maintain life, hope, resilience, and perseverance, even in the most impossible circumstances. Joy isn't an escape.

REFERENCES

Exodus 32:1-14

Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23

Philippians 4:1-9

Matthew 22:1-14

COLORS

Green

Planning Worship

Focus text: **Philippians 4:1-9**

I don't know about you, but oftentimes, joy feels like a luxury. An add-on. An I'll-get-to-that-if-I-ever-have-free-time kind of thing. So, when Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice," I'm tempted to respond, "Got that covered on Sundays, but there's too much going on in this world to spend time on joy or rejoicing the other six days of the week." But then, I come across an article or a podcast ([like this one with Brené Brown and Karen Walrond](#)) that stops me in my tracks and calls me out on just how wrong I am. What Paul, Brené, and Karen all know that I all too quickly forget is that joy isn't a luxury or a distraction. *Joy is vital*. We can't do this thing called life without it. And more importantly, we don't have to manufacture it. Joy is a gift, an act of grace in

our lives that points us back to God and flows out of us to others. Joy gives us sustenance to maintain life, hope, resilience, and perseverance, even in the most impossible circumstances.

Joy isn't an escape. True joy accompanies us in and through the realness of our lives. So, even as you focus on rejoicing today, don't forget the prayer of confession or the prayers of the people. Speak the truth about how we fall short. Name the places of hurt and suffering in your community. We can rejoice in God because in all of our faults and our pain, we are not alone. God is with us. So, bring out the noisemakers; pull out all the stops on the organ; lift up your voices. Find extra moments of celebration and praise throughout the service. Let the joy come in response to God's never-ending, always-loving presence among us, in response to God's acts of pardon, nurture, and provision. Whatever you do, don't just talk about joy. Practice full, embodied joy together!

As we end this series, consider using the following breath prayer to draw attention to God's acts and our joyful response: ***(Breathe in)* I rejoice in God, *(breathe out)* because God's love will never let me go.** Encourage congregants to use this prayer in the week ahead and beyond to focus attention on God's love at work among us and the joy that sustains us as we press on together.

Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts Ministries, served as an organist and music minister in United Methodist congregations in the legacy Northwest Texas and North Texas Annual Conferences, as well as the New Day Amani/Upendo house churches in Dallas. After receiving her Master of Sacred Music and Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology, Lisa earned her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University, where she researched and wrote on the doctrine of Christ, disability, and atonement.

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