

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 5 2025

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"It's About the Joy"

Based on Luke 17:5-6

It amazes me, and it perplexes me, that the 'small' places of the world (and with that phrase my arrogance is already showing) have Christian churches that are thriving; bulging at the rafters, sitting on the ground, and spilling out the doors kind of worship. These are places in the world...

- Some of us would have trouble finding on a map
- That give a new definition to the word 'poverty'
- Where the yearly salary is about the same as we would spend on a winter vacation
- Countries that will never be invited to the Security Council at the United Nations...

And yet, the Christian faith flourishes in the midst of it all the faces of their poverty, while our churches languish with empty pews, shrinking budgets and general disarray. I often ask myself:

- What are we missing?
- What is their secret to successful church?
- What are their leaders doing that I am not?

- How can we learn from them?
- How can I learn from them?

It's joy. It boils down to a mustard seed of joy.

- They have 'joy in the Lord' and we do not.
- They live with 'joy in their heart' and we do not.
- They trust their God...and we do not.

Now many have said that Christianity rises when the world is pulled down. History proves this to be correct. So, some would argue that the reason Christianity is flourishing in third world or developing countries, is because of their poverty; there is nothing else to cling to, so they cling to Christ.

That's not good enough for me. Because when I watch the videos Presbyterian World Service & Development send out each year about the mission work of the church in far away places, when I look carefully at the photos Rev. Juliette sends me from worship in Madagascar,

- I do not see desperate people
- I see impoverished people filled with joy.
- And frankly, I want a

piece of that.

- Maybe you would like a piece of that as well.

When God created you and I, scripture tells us that

"He created us in his own image..." (Genesis 1:27).

Since God is the source of all joy, then by our own creation, a portion of that is within each of us. A mustard seed of joy. We don't need to go looking for that joy. It's already within us.

If that is so, then the question becomes, are we going to fan that flame of joy, grow that seed within ourselves, to become the mustard tree of Luke's parable?

- Are we going to stretch high into the sky and sway with the wind?
- Are we going to shade the crops in the field from the hot sun?
- Are we going to shelter the birds for their nests?
- Are we going to become a messy, brambly hedge that make secret places for lovers' whispers, and comforts the weary, the frightened, the distraught?

We know this is what the church can be for the world.

We know this is what the church can be for us.

And evidence shows us, that this is what is happening in churches around the world that we long to be like.

- It begins with joy.
- It ends with joy.

Our personal faith with Christ deepens, when we focus on the joy. The growth and rebuilding of the church happens, not because of budgets or poverty lines, or our country's Gross Domestic Product, but because of the joy within it.

As we prepare to share Communion with one another, and with our brothers and sisters around the world...

Let us think of those places where joy abounds.

Let us fan the flames of our own joy, buried within our soul.

Let us flourish, like they are.

Let us live fully, like they are.

Let us bring joy to our table today.

Amen.