



1506 Orchard Terrace
Linden, NJ 07036-3807
908.486.3073
908-386.3079 Fax
www.lindenpres.org

Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
Manse: 908.925.4939

Sunday, January 10, 2010

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 62: 1-5
Psalm 36: 5-10
John 2: 1-12
I Corinthians 12: 1-11

Sermon Title: "The Sign of Joy"

Sermon Topic: Christian Joy

Sermon Purpose: To teach the nature of Christian joy and that such a thing as a joyful Christian **does** exist.

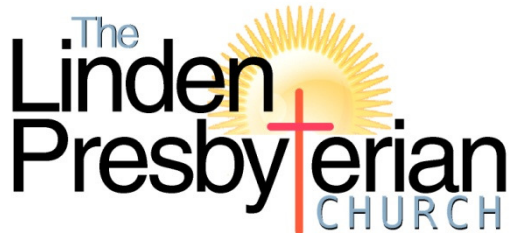
.....
Sermon Prayer: Powerful and joy-giving God, help us to search Your Word and to know Your Will. Guide us as we serve in the way, the truth, and the life of Christ's ministry to the world around us. Heal us by Your Word and by Your Spirit. Now, may the words of my lips and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

When we think of the characteristics of the Christian life, what comes to mind? [Let people answer.] When we think of the things that **should** mark the **real** believer, a "Christian," rarely would we include **joy** in the list at all. And certainly it would **never** be very high on the list, should it **be** included. We might think **immediately** of seriousness, sobriety, and intensity! But joy and gladness would not figure very prominently because it's common knowledge that "Christians aren't supposed to laugh or smile!" There's an unfortunate tendency in common religious thinking and living.

What a **travesty** this is! This is so **far** removed from the radiant experience of Jesus! Of course, the fullness of his **being** included joy as a highly serious matter. Sorrow (about our human folly and wickedness) was often observed in Him. But, along **with** it was a note of joy and gladness that provided such a **rich** contrast! He could respond to the beauty of a flower, note the flight of birds, kindle a smile at the sight and presence of children, and use humorous images in His teaching. (Pointing out the folly of picking a speck of dust from your neighbor's eye when a two-by-four plank protrudes from your **own** eye.) It's not necessary to **deny** the sorrow. But it's also a **distortion** of our Lord's nature to **overlook** the quality of **joy**.

Now, I grant you there are times in our lives when we have difficulty finding joy in **anything** around us; what with illness, injury, family problems, financial concerns, and everything else that assails us in this world. **But**, to say that our life is **miserable** because we are **Christians**, and that Christians aren't permitted to have fun, is an out and out lie! It's a lie against us, against Christ Jesus, and against the Will of God.





1506 Orchard Terrace
Linden, NJ 07036-3807
908.486.3073
908-386.3079 Fax
www.lindenpres.org

Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
Manse: 908.925.4939

If God didn't have a sense of humor, do you **really** think He would have made our neighbors **look** the way they do? Take a minute and look around you. Don't you think possibly it's because of God's warped sense of humor and irony that some of the things happen in our lives the way they do?

Before we go any further, let's be certain that we understand one another when we use the word "**joy**." When I speak of a person who possesses true joy, I don't mean someone who is laughing or giggling all the time. Joy is not constant giddiness. Nor is it that perpetual fake **smile** we see on so many faces.

Joy is that sense of peace and the deeply rooted happiness that helps us remember that **through it all**, we have a source of strength and of hope that does **not** disappoint us. It's **more** than **contentment**, more than fleeting **pleasure**, more than **enchantment** or **infatuation**. It comes to us through a sense of **loving** and **being loved**. It's a sense of spiritual and emotional **security** that grows in our hearts and in our lives.

Like other living things, it needs nourishment and care, or it withers and dies. You can't see it, or hold it. You can't smell it or taste it, but you **experience** it. And (like a reflection of the soul) it's reflection can be seen in the way we live our lives – **through** the good times and the bad. The **reflection** is **not** the exact and perfect image, but it **is** a reasonable facsimile – as close as we can come to being accurate.

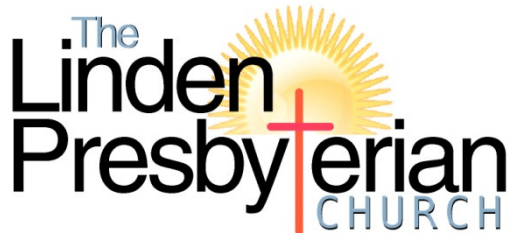
Anyway, this capacity for joy finds reflection in Jesus' participation in the wedding in Cana of Galilee. This was an event in which He shared, shortly after the calling of the disciples. It was an invitation that had been sent to Jesus and to His disciples, and in **that** day, such an invitation carried a great amount of weight. A wedding was a festive and **important** occasion for the whole community – but **especially** for the honored guests. The feast lasted a **full seven days** and the entire occasion was an elaborate celebration. The bride, after the ceremonial washing, was beautified with cosmetics, donned with jewels, and garbed in her wedding finery. When all the preparations were concluded, the groom came in a **procession** to the feast. He, too, was dressed in his finest clothing. The groom and his men distributed fresh sweetmeats (candies and sugary cakes) as they made their way, guided by torches. When they heard of his approach, the bride's attendants went out to meet him. **Then, the festivities really began!**

And, for this joyous occasion, the ordinary rules of **fasting** were **cancelled**. It was one of the **most** joyous of **all** occasions. People were allowed to **celebrate**: food, wine, song, dance, kissing and hugging, smiles and tears for happy.

Anyway, keep that in mind, for a few moments, while we come to that same point from a different angle.

We should remember that in John's account of Jesus' mission, John is always determined to point out certain signs. In his artfully constructed Gospel, nothing is chosen casually: all that he includes is written there to help us to know "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that in believing you may have life in his name." (John 20: 30) So, with that in mind, the selection of the incident at the marriage feast cannot be **accidental**. It has to be **significant** for us that the **first** miracle





1506 Orchard Terrace
Linden, NJ 07036-3807
908.486.3073
908-386.3079 Fax
www.lindenpres.org

Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
Manse: 908.925.4939

Jesus performed to show His glory and power, was done in the context of an event of great joy – the wedding feast, the wedding **reception**.

The events recorded at **this** wedding reception are intended to underscore the way Jesus enhances life's blessings.

The six stone jars of water, each containing about twenty gallons, were for the rites of purification, the washing of hands and utensils. John intends for us to see a **contrast** between the old Jewish faith (the water being an element of an outwardly purifying ritual) and the **new** faith brought about by Jesus Who is alive with **spiritual** power – inward purification. The transformation of this **wash water** into **wine** is intended to illuminate and to demonstrate the way Jesus brings joy into the common, mundane, human existence.

If He can change **dishwater** into **wine**, what in the world do you think He can do with a life that is grayed or soured from the grime of this world? The point that John is making is the fact that Jesus **can** - and **does** – bring abundant life to human beings. At **no** point does John let slip through his fingers the chance to drive home what is to be the central message of his gospel. He points out, for example, that the jars were filled to the **brim**, and he lets that fact call our attention to the way in which Jesus lavishly gives to us. Also, those jars were made of stone, signifying the hardness (the difficulty) of our lives into which these blessings are poured.

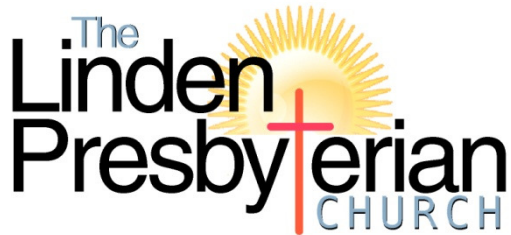
It really isn't **hard** to understand why Christians should be a **joyous** people. What **is** hard to understand is why so many Christians, with so many strong reasons for **joy**, should be so **miserable!** It is suggested that there are three strong **enemies** of joy: **guilt**, **loneliness**, and **aimlessness**. It is **also** suggested that **each** of these enemies is defeated by **faith**.

The reality of a God who **knows** and **cares** about us is a very **definite** source of joy. This really and truly **isn't** a friendless and cold universe, not a hostile place taking no notice of our existence or caring nothing about our hopes and dreams. I realize it may **seem** that way, sometimes; **particularly** in more heavily populated urban, extremely fast-paced geographic areas.

But, the great affirmation of faith in God is not simply concerned with **mighty** events (the stars in their courses, the rise and fall of nations, the parting of the sea, earthquakes, and the like). The great affirmation is that **God knows and cares about each one of us!** In a world where we are sometimes tempted to let ourselves be overwhelmed by immensity and feel afraid in the face of it, it's a tremendous **source of strength and comfort** for us to be able to know that God notes a sparrow's fall and that in His presence the very hairs of our head are numbered (the ones we **have**, as well as the ones we **used** to have). And, what's **more**, He remembers where they **went!** (How else do you account for those people who survive earthquakes, having been buried under rubble for **weeks?** God **noted** where they were, **noted who** they were, **noted** that it was **not** yet time for them to join Him in heaven, **provided** air for them to breathe and food for their nourishment, and even **led** rescuers **to** them.)

Isn't it a strange thing? Living, as we do, in a world so full of wonders; so many people claim to be **bored**. They find no **joy** in life because their lives are **aimless**. They live by random movements;





1506 Orchard Terrace
Linden, NJ 07036-3807
908.486.3073
908-386.3079 Fax
www.lindenpres.org

Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
Manse: 908.925.4939

nothing seems directed toward a goal. They are not a part of anything that lifts them out of the prison of the self. This aimlessness seems to grow worse with each generation. The more I talk to young adults, and the more I ask them what lies beyond high school, technical school, or college, the more I hear: “Well, I guess I’ll get a (another) degree.” “What are you going to study?” “I don’t know.” “What are you going to do with your degree?” “I really don’t know. All I **do** know is that I’ll get a better **job** and more **money**, if I have that (next) degree.”

And let’s not leave it at the doorstep of the young adults, either. When I’m talking with those in their forties and fifties, **many** times the conversation goes like this: “Do you like your job?” “It’s a job. And, the salary puts food on the table and pays most of the bills.” “What would it take for you to **like** your job? What would make you **happy**?” “I have no idea.”

This **aimlessness** is not specific to gender, to age, or to race. It seems to be general. The **exception**, these days, is the person who **knows** what he/she wants and is striving to reach it.

It’s significant that Jesus came to the wedding in Cana closely upon the calling of His disciples and the enlistment of Philip and Nathaniel. When Jesus said to the disciples, “Follow me,” He lifted them out of their concern for themselves. They were being liberated from self-centeredness, aimless daily existence, loneliness, and guilt (the principle enemies of joyous living) into a concern for the Kingdom of God. From that moment on, their lives were to take on a quality of **significance**. They had heard and **responded** to the life-giving summons, “Follow me” and in so doing, they had been liberated from aimlessness into **purpose**.

The winsome attractiveness of Jesus is found in the way in which He mixes (in His life) the qualities needed for significant living. He shared the joy of a wedding feast, and at that time showed the first signs of His glory. He wept at the death of a friend and over a city. In strange and wondrous ways, He blended the deep qualities of existence. So **complete** was this fusion of elements in Him that it could be said of Him, “that for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross...” The first sign of our Lord was **joy**, and His followers need to **continue** in that same quality.

Let us pray:

Father, God, today, we come seeking your joy in our lives. We’re not asking for mere understanding of the **nature** of that joy, but rather for the actual **experience** of it that permeates our whole existence, that enables us to share in the lives of our family, friends, and neighbors. It’s this quality that leads others to Christ by its mere presence. We ask that as we serve our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, your love through him might be more fulfilled in us – making us recognize how it makes a difference to us in every aspect of our lives, helping us to accept forgiveness, and enabling us to live as forgiven and loved people who can be strong enough to forgive and to love, in return. In Jesus’ name, we ask it by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

