

88th Annual Reunion Service, Central Mine Methodist Church – July 31, 1994

Minister: Rev. Dr. Daniel Rosemergy

Organ Preludes Donald M. Ross

***Introit:** Your Voices Tune (Handel)

Greetings: Dr. Fred W. Bryant

Hymn: For the Beauty of the Earth

Invocation and Lord's Prayer

***Anthem:** Praise, O Praise the Lord (Erick Thiman)

Responsive Reading: Selections from Psalms 97, 98, & 100

Hymn: All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name (Diadem)

Scripture Readings: Proverbs 8:30-31 & Zephaniah 3:14-18, Philippians 4:4-9, Mark 10:13-16

Vocal Quartet: O Love That Will Not Let Me Go (Matheson/Peace)
Pat Mitchell, Donna Koskiniemi, Pete Manderfield, Dan Rosemergy

Pastoral Prayer & In Remembrance: Floyd Brooks (1899-1994)
Dr. Ralph J. Jalkonen (1918-1993)
Eva E. Mathews (1899-1994)
Marcella Rosemergy Sincock (1906-1994)

Announcements and Remarks: Dr. Fred W. Bryant

Offering and *Offertory Anthem: O Taste and See How Gracious the Lord Is (Sir John Goss)

Doxology

Sermon: **To Play and To Love** (Abridged)

Let me ask you a couple of questions. First, can you imagine a God who plays? Second, do you play—every day of your life? (And don't tell me you're too old!)

Those who were here last year when I preached on "To Work and to Love" are saying to yourselves—First he wants us to work and now play. Which is it? I want us to do both—plus worship. Work, Play, Worship—all as a part of God's creative presence in our lives and in the universe.

Generally, we separate work, play, and worship in our lives. We experience fragments of work, fragments of play, fragments of worship, but rarely, if ever, experience a harmony and wholeness of work, play, worship. Why can't we find that harmony? Gordon Dahl [author of *Work, Play, and Worship*] suggests that too often we worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship. He urges us instead to find a unified balance and recommends that we experience our work as play, to see our play as worship, and to make worship our work. (Someone last year challenged me to say that rapidly 5 times.) If we can do that, we will experience our lives and daily activities in a different way.

The early settlers had an awareness of God's activities in the world as all encompassing—in the stillness of the mine drift they were working, in the beauty of nature, in the Fourth of July celebration, in the chapel listening to the Word preached or singing hymns. They worked hard, played well, and worshipped God in all they did. To read their stories is to sense a simplicity and to be moved by their appreciation for the connectedness of their lives. And they did it with their own humor, their sense of fun and celebration, and enjoyment of living.

It's fun to read about how they played—the Annual Church Concert, Fourth of July and Christmas celebrations, their love of music—coronet bands, soloists, congregational and “in the home” singing around a reed organ, the changing social scene with the introduction of “parties” and community preparation for taking part in the Calumet Grand Tournament on July 4th.

Play/Leisure. We still do many of these things, but not with the same spirit. How have we lost our sense of play? Why don't we know how to truly use our leisure? Ben Hunnicutt [Leisure Studies Professor, U. Iowa] recommends that people work less and learn to use leisure time properly. Leisure is not just kicking back and enjoying yourself, but rather “time to spend with your family and helping out in the community. It's for reading books, writing letters, and learning to play a musical instrument. It's for forging relationships and asking philosophical questions such as ‘What is my purpose on earth?’” Hint: the answer is not your job title. He suggests that religion might be the ultimate answer. “Work took us away from God. Maybe leisure can lead us back” (*Tennessean*, 4 May 1994). I think that can be the case.

A Theology of Play. Dahl suggests that leisure is essentially spiritual rather than economic or social. It is freedom that both allows and enables us to occasionally transcend economic and social realities to participate in a higher sense of reality. We can think of it as “free spirit” rather than “free time.” Leisure is a quality of life rather than fragments of time. Leisure can be a synthesizing factor, a way we can pull together and give meaning to all our life experience—work, play, and worship.

Easier said than done, you say. Fair enough. How can we change our sense of leisure or play to help us center ourselves in a way that has a spiritual core? Our scriptures today provide a wonderful perspective on play, all of which concern God's continuing presence in creation.

First, God's very nature is joy. God does play.

Second, God in Christ reminded us to allow the child within us to be engaged in creation and become a part of God's reign (kingdom).

Third, if we do that, we experience God's grace and love in our lives. It is a peace that centers our very being, that in our leisure opens us to God and re-creates us as we do the work of creation.

The residents of Central Mine were closer to it than most of us. In fragmenting our lives, in finding meaning only in work, we fail to make the connection. We become so anxious about position, security, success that we miss the richness of the many free gifts around us. As adults, we lose the curiosity, naturalness, awe, fun of the child within each of us. In following misguided measures of success, we damper down our own children and those around us.

Ann Weems is a writer who brings faith-filled, creative insights into our contemporary lives. Some lines from her poem “Balloons Belong in Church” guide us through this theology of play—and letting out our inner child.

I took to church one morning a happy four-year-old boy

Holding a bright blue string to which was attached his much-loved orange balloon with pink stripes . . .

Certainly a thing of beauty

And if not forever, at least a joy, for a very important now.

When later he met me at the door,

Clutching the blue string, orange and pink bobbing behind him,

He didn't have to tell me something had gone wrong.

"What's the matter?"

He wouldn't tell me.

"I bet they loved your balloon..."

Out it came then, mocking the teacher's voice:

"We don't bring balloons to church."

Then that little four-year-old, his lip a bit trembly, asked:

"Why aren't balloons allowed in church? I thought God would like balloons."

God's Playground. Most of us don't think God plays. As adults, our image of God becomes serious, and in part, that may be why we're so serious. We think of God's judgment or wrath, of God's mercy or forgiveness, of God's kingdom, but we lose God as joy, of God at play in creation, of God rejoicing over us. What a loss.

I love the verses from Zephaniah:

God will rejoice over you with happy song. . . .

God will dance with shouts of joy for you as on the day of a festival (Zep. 3:18)

Isn't it wonderful to think of God singing over us and dancing with shouts of joy? *In May I Have This Dance*, Joyce Rupp (a Roman Catholic nun, spiritual director, writer) suggests that "prayer is a time to dance with our Divine Partner, to let God take the lead, and to enjoy the true delight and source of life that God is for us" (p. 130). In the chapter "The Playground of God," she shows how scripture tells us again and again that God's playground is creation and the people who dwell in it. "God enjoys this beauty, sees that it is good, and takes great delight in all that is. The Spirit of God dances among us, calls us to appreciate and enjoy life, and invites us to participate in the divine song that makes melody in the heart of all creation" (p. 95). Rupp suggests there's "gusto, passion, and enthusiasm in this dimension of God, a sense of awe, wonder, and delight."

Our living—our work, play, and worship—should reflect this. With the Psalmist, we should "make a joyful noise before the Lord." Why do you think the folks here at Central had such a wonderful coronet band? Alfred Nichols writes, "Central Mine was noted far and wide for its excellent musical accomplishments. It became the standard of comparisons for similar choruses, soloists, and musical organizations throughout the country. All who lived here had endearing memories, not the least among them would be the fine church choir. They would recall the strong manly voices in song on the 'man-engine' as they descended into the depths of the mind, of the mothers and daughters singing together while attending to their household duties, of various groups of splendid carol singers at Christmas" (p. 117). All singing and playing a joyful song to God—a God who took great delight in them, I'm sure.

Nichols writes that following the playing of the Calumet band, "In the distance you could hear the baa of sheep, cows began to bleat, roosters were crowing, dogs barking, ducks quacking. Oh, it seemed as if all nature was awake and bursting into a song of joy and gladness." "God will rejoice over you with happy song" (Zep. 3:18).

Ann Weems reminds us to celebrate God's creation, and I have paraphrased and adapted for us:

I celebrate balloons, parades, and currant cookies.
I celebrate rugged shore lines and black bears.
I celebrate aromas: bread baking and pasties in the ovens.
I celebrate seeing: wildflowers, vegetables in the gardens, and copper ore in the mines.
I celebrate hearing: Lake Superior waves pounding, rain falling, soft voices.
I celebrate touching: toes in the sand, a kitten's fur, another person.
I celebrate the sun that shines slap dab on our faces.
I celebrate snow falling—and the life-giving green of the trees.
I celebrate birth: the wonder—the miracle of that tiny life already asserting its self-hood."

I celebrate God at play with us in creation.

Come Play. I have a framed calligraphy: "Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God." We're invited to play—to experience God's joy in the world, and to become a part of God's reign (kingdom) in the world. Rupp asks the right question: "Why do so many deny or suppress the God of dance and song, of celebration and enthusiasm? Perhaps because adults often lose a part of themselves. Their inner child has been forgotten or pushed aside for adult business and busyness."

That was the case of the disciples who were annoyed at the mothers bringing their children to Jesus to be touched, to be blessed. They had no time for the children. They had been arguing about greatness and who would share the power with Jesus in his promised kingdom--these—the very followers who knew that Jesus' whole ministry was concerned with awakening men, women, and children to be responsive to God's vision of love, peace, and justice. They knew that much of the opposition to Jesus came from those who lacked imagination, receptivity, and a child-like capacity to act upon what they understood, holding fast to adult skepticism and misgivings. Jesus was troubled when he saw them turn the children away. He called the children to him, taking them into his arms and blessing them. In referring to the children, Jesus said, "for to such belong the realm of God—and whoever does not receive the realm of God like a child shall not enter it." Jesus does not ask us to become children again but rather as children of God to remain open to the child-like qualities of awe, wonder, trust, spontaneity, which we so often restrict and lose in our adult living. Much of the joy of life is missed.

The folks at Central lived that joy. One of the year's highlights was the Christmas Tree Service with its committees to plan and collect funds to get the children gifts—mittens, suspenders, pocket knives, mouth organs, knitted hoods, scarves. Gifts were put under evergreen branches and excess gifts hung on two clotheslines across the church, especially for toys—brass horns, jumping jacks, dolls. Every child had at least one gift.

The adults played, too. Nichols describes the Calumet Grand Tournament—a 300-yard dash, sack race, hop-step-jump, climbing a greased pole, hammer and drill contests. Committees prepared Central's participants—these men could play. Their sense of play and fun can be heard in their humor—practical jokes, love of singing, in their appreciation of God's gifts of life to them.

Are you open to play? To laughter? To joy? A recent article reported that young children laugh/giggle 450 times a day and adults 8 times a day. It's time to loosen up. I try to do that.

A short time ago I was visiting a church member in the hospital and was walking down a hallway. I saw a mother and her small son coming down the hall towards me. He was skipping. It looked like fun so I started to skip. I got some stares from other adults, but the little boy was delighted, skipping faster

toward me and laughing. Then he stopped and said to his mother, "Look, that man is skipping, too!" We both laughed and resumed skipping down the hall in opposite directions.

Have you skipped lately? Or sung a song going up in the elevator to work, as the miners did going down and up in the skip car?

God offers grace/peace. Play becomes an inner attitude in how we approach life and people, our encounters and involvements with life that re-create us and give us a glimpse of the divine. In such moments of God's presence and grace, we are thankful for our living.

Dick Buller, soloist and storyteller at Central, had won the singing contest at the Calumet Grand Tournament. On the trip back to Central, he describes his feelings: "In my heart, my very soul, there began the glorious dawn of a more perfect vision, a more sharply defined perception of the divine, harmonious setting of a fragrant, fertile earth, marvelously arrayed; all perfect gifts from the benevolent hands of God" (Nicholls, p. 272).

This captures the meaning of the verses from Philippians in which the writer says that the more we experience God's grace, the more our thanksgiving to God increases and the more confident we can be that God is with us always. "Rejoice, God is at hand. Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer with thanksgiving let your requests and needs be known to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will be with you."

That peace sustains us, even when the going gets rough. We all know that on every playground, there are bullies. So many in our world live in poverty or experience political, economic, or social oppression, or are victims of catastrophe, conflict, or violence. The list of those who are knocked down is long, but we're called in our work and play to be a part of bringing about God's reign of justice and peace in this world for everyone. Eventually all of us will "fall down"—experience hurt or pain or simply age. We are called in our work and play to care for one another. We are called to reflect God's love in the world through our living.

I celebrate that we are called God's children, to enjoy *being over doing*. When we rediscover the child within us, we truly glimpse the Spirit.

[From *The Long Winter's End*] One early Sunday morning, Jake and John set out on a hike with Allen and Mr. Frost, their teacher. Each had a pasty in his pocket. They walked for hours observing the beauty of nature, and at the stream's edge, spread their food on a flat rock. "Peace was in the air of the place, and a quiet that reached the inner depths of a man, that made him aware of the immensities that dwelt beyond the rim of his universe, yet touched his world and him. Allen, without raising his eyes, in a voice low but clear, said, 'He leadeth me beside these still waters.' 'That will serve as grace,' said Frost (p. 322).

Weems concludes:

I celebrate life—that we may live abundantly.
Where did we get the idea that balloons don't belong in church?
Where did we get the idea that God loves gray and sh-h-h-h
And drab and anything will do?
I think it's blasphemy not to appreciate the joy in God's world.
I think it's blasphemy not to bring our joy into God's church
So celebrate!
Bring your balloons and your butterflies, your bouquets of flowers.

Bring the torches and hold them high!
Dance your dances, paint your feelings, sing your songs, whistle, laugh.
Life is a celebration, an affirmation of God's love.
Life is distributing more balloons.
For God so loved the world . . .
Surely that's a cause for joy.
Surely we should celebrate.
Good news! That God should love us that much.
Where did we ever get the idea that balloons don't belong in church?

Amen.

[Contemporary Reading: Ann Weems, "Balloons Belong in Church"]

Hymn: I Love to Tell the Story

Benediction, Response, and Postlude

Organist: Donald M. Ross

***Choir Members:** *Sopranos:* Sue Adams, Mary Henderson, Pearl Jalkanen, Betty Martin, Deanna Martin, Pat Mitchell

Altos: Flora Graham, Carolyn Meyer, Connie Plymat

Tenors: Richard Hutchison, Peter Manderfield, Mark Spreitzer, Jack Trudgeon,

Basses: Dr. Fred Bryant, Jay Martin, Stanley Martin, Jack Porritt

Executive Committee Members: Dr. Fred W. Bryant, Gary A. Bryant, Robert J. Bryant, James K. Curto, Jeffrey Nicholls Curto, David C. Heikka, Hollace G. Roberts, Donald M. Ross, R. Charles Stetter, David H. Thomas, Harry J. Vine, Dr. Brian D. Wake, John E. Wilson