

“Joy”

© Christine Odell (Sheasby) 2017

Dear Friends,

The theme for this Local Arrangement Service is “Joy”, as we share ‘the Easter joy which death could not imprison’.

Please feel free to ‘customize’ your service to your own congregation... e.g. Instead of Mother Julian’s story, a member of the congregation could tell of an experience of joy after suffering. Instead of the meditation there could be a story about finding something that is lost, or about a conversion experience. You will also need to spend a bit of time preparing the prayers of intercession. On page 2 it is suggested that music be played during a time of quiet reflection. This could be either organ/piano or recorded, but will need planning. The hymns are only suggestions - if your congregation knows others that fit in with the theme, especially any newer ones, you could use those. This is *your congregation’s* service of worship to God.

Chris Odell (Sheasby)

“Joy”

Call to Worship: Leader 1

Praise God with shouts of joy, all people!
Sing to the glory of his name; offer him glorious praise!

We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song!
And so we sing in joy together...

HYMN – Jesus is Lord of all the earth... *StF 295: H&P 250.*

Prayer of Adoration: Leader 2 Response...The Lord of Life is risen, Alleluia: **Alleluia.**

Let us pray,
Loving God, we worship you today with joy in our hearts.
You raised your Son to life again on Easter Sunday,
And so we can rejoice that not even sin, suffering or death,
Can separate us from your love.
The Lord of Life is risen, Alleluia: **Alleluia.**
Lord Jesus Christ, we worship you today with joy in our hearts,
For you are alive for evermore.
You surprised your friends with the joy of your resurrection
And now you stand among us in your risen power.
The Lord of Life is risen, Alleluia: **Alleluia.**
Holy Spirit, we worship you today with joy in our hearts.
You give new life to the people of God.
You make us more like Jesus, you fill us with his love, you transform us with joy,
You strengthen us by your living presence within us.
The Lord of Life is risen, Alleluia: **Alleluia. Amen.**

Introduction to the theme of the service: Leader 1

Our prayer of adoration is a prayer of rejoicing. The Bible is always telling us to rejoice! Joy is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Joy is the emotion we associate with Easter. In our service this morning we're going to ask the question 'What is joy? – is it just the fleeting happiness we find in our everyday lives - or is it something more?'

The writers of the Psalms in the Old Testament talk a lot about joy. The joy they talk about is not only the joy of God's people, but of all creation, because of his love and care for all. We will read together Psalm 96, (*responsively, or two sides of church, or men & women, or children & adults etc.*), which you will find in your hymnbook...

Psalm: Psalm 96 *StF 819: H&P 867 - 'O sing to the Lord a new song.....*

Reflection: Reader 1

In the book, 'The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry' by Rachel Joyce, Harold, who has recently retired, sets out, on an unplanned impulse, to walk from the South West to Berwick on Tweed, in the Borders, where his friend of years ago, Queenie, is dying of cancer. He believes that this pilgrimage will save her. He is unfit and unequipped for the walk. He often nearly gives up. At one point, quite early on, the weather takes a turn for the worse, and as he trudges along the side of a busy road he is soaked to the skin by the rain and splattered with mud by the passing traffic. He is at very low ebb. Then, suddenly, at the end of the afternoon, the rain stops. The sun comes out for a short time, and the sky above the nearby hills is streaked with gold and peach, blue, green and crimson. He is surprised by a feeling of joy, his spirits are lifted, and he sets his face towards the next town, and the next encounters.

Comment: Leader 1

'Surprised by Joy' is the title of a book by C S Lewis in which, he tells how,

page 1

as a young man, he was turned from being an atheist into being a Christian. The title came from a poem by William Wordsworth, in which he describes how a sudden, unexpected feeling of joy comes to him even while mourning the death of his beloved young daughter. Feelings of joy often come as a surprise. They are not, like feelings of happiness, dependent on our circumstances, our health, or our mood. They cannot be sought out. 'Joy' is pure gift, a gift from our gracious, loving God.

So many things may gift us joy – nature in her beauty, music, love, new life. Let us now take a few minutes (*either 'in silence' or 'listening to music'*) to think about experiences that have brought joy to us, and thank God for them... *SILENCE or MUSIC for 2-3 minutes*

Prayer: Leader 2

Loving, generous God, thank you for the moments of joy you bring into our lives.
Forgive us when we do not open our eyes, ears or hearts to receive your gift.
Forgive us, when in our daily preoccupations we forget those moments.
Forgive us in the name of Jesus who came to share the joy of your love with us, **Amen.**

The Psalmist wrote 'Tears may flow in the night, but joy comes in the morning.' That lovely reassurance is echoed in the words of our next hymn...

HYMN: Morning has broken, like the first morning...*StF 136; H&P 635; MP 467.*

New Testament Reading 1: Reader 2 - Matthew 28:1-8

After the Sabbath, as Sunday morning was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

Suddenly there was a violent earthquake; an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone away, and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid that they trembled and became like dead men.

The angel spoke to the women. "You must not be afraid," he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has been raised, just as he said. Come here and see the place where he was lying. Go quickly now, and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from death, and now he is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him!' Remember what I have told you."

So they left the tomb in a hurry, afraid and yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Reflection: Reader 3 'Tears may flow in the night, but joy comes in the morning.'

Neither of us had slept that night,
Our minds still too full of the horror of his death;
Our hearts still too full of pain.
It had been a long, dark night of blinding sorrow and tears.

But still the bright sun rose on our altered world.
The day of rest past, the necessary time had come
For us to wearily take ourselves to anoint his body
With both our spices and our tears.

Our hearts were heavy within us,
Heavy with loss, heavy with despair,
Heavy at the thought of the days that lay ahead,
Heavy as the stone we did not know how we should roll away.

And yet – it had gone! From the darkness of the tomb
Streamed forth light, and a message of joy –
He is alive! He will wait for us in Galilee! We shall see him!
Surprised by Joy, we ran, to share the Good News!

HYMN: I know that my Redeemer lives... *StF 303; H&P 196; MP 278.*

Story from life: Reader 4 - Mother Julian of Norwich

Nothing is known of Mother Julian before she took her place as an anchoress living alone in a cell at Saint Julian's Church in Norwich. Even her original name is uncertain, as she probably took the name by which she is known from the church she entered. She lived in a tumultuous time: the Black Death was raging in Europe; the Hundred Years' War between England and France had begun in 1337; famine and cattle disease contributed to the forces that caused the Peasants' Revolt. She would have been aware of the great suffering of her time.

At the age of 30, when she had a severe illness and believed she was dying, Julian had a series of intense visions of Christ. These visions, 20 years later, would be the source of her major written work, called 'Revelations of Divine Love'. Julian's theology was particularly optimistic, considering the times in which she lived. She saw God as a mother—perhaps the first writer to express this idea—and believed that God feels no wrath toward mankind but will one day make "all things well."

Julian reported having a personal and two-way relationship with God in which she received insight and understanding as a result of the questions she asked him. Although she lived in a time of turmoil, Julian's theology was positive, speaking of God's love in terms of joy and compassion as opposed to duty and punishment.

New Testament Reading 2: Reader 1 Luke 15:4

Our second gospel reading reminds us that not only do we find joy in God, but God finds joy in us:

Jesus said "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them - what do you do? You leave the other ninety-nine sheep in the pasture and go looking for the one that got lost until you find it.

When you find it, you are so happy that you put it on your shoulders and carry it back home. Then you call your friends and neighbours together and say to them, 'I am so happy I found my lost sheep. Let us celebrate!'

In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent.

"Or suppose a woman who has ten silver coins loses one of them - what does she do? She lights a lamp, sweeps her house, and looks carefully everywhere until she finds it. When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together, and says to them, 'I am so happy I found the coin I lost. Let us celebrate!'

In the same way, I tell you, the angels of God rejoice over one sinner who repents."

Meditation: Reader 2

Mother Julian of Norwich wrote 'He loves us and enjoys us, and so wills that we love him and enjoy him, and firmly trust him, and all shall be well.'...

Enjoy **us**, God?

So often we feel that your love for us means

That we bring you pain, disappointment, frustration,

Through our weaknesses and waywardness.

Yet, God,

You are like our parents, our partners, our friends.

If they, in their love for us, enjoy the people we are,

How much more, in your greater love, will You also enjoy us!

Enjoy **You**, God?

Just as it is hard for us to love others to order,

So it is hard to make ourselves feel joy.

Wonderful God, fill us with wonder; Faithful God, fill us with faith;

Loving God, fill us with love

That we may come to truly enjoy you,

Source of purest joy!

Offering: congregation remain seated, singing

HYMN: Give me joy in my heart... *StF 76; H&P 492.*

Offering Prayer: Leader 2 Let us pray -

God who rejoices in your people,
make us cheerful givers
of the things that we own
and the people we are. In Jesus's Name, **Amen.**

HYMN: Father of everlasting grace...*StF 378; H&P 300*

Prayers of Intercession: Leader 2 Response – In your loving mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Let us pray -

Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of joy:

The sudden throbs of joy that surprise us in our daily lives in your beautiful world;
The joy that comes from knowing that Christ has risen triumphant over death and sin;
The joy that comes to those who give their lives to you
And who can remain thankful and trusting even in difficult and dark times.
We thank you for the gift of joy. In your loving mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

But, Lord, we remember the many times when we cannot be happy:

When we are ill or in pain, bereaved or anxious about loved ones.

We pray for (*insert names etc. or SILENCE*)

In your loving mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We remember before you those for whom life is joyless:

Those who are lonely or depressed, those struggling to find food or shelter.

We pray for..... (*insert situation, or SILENCE*)

In your loving mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We remember the times when following you has made us unhappy:

When you've called us to do costly things for you;

When the pain of loving and being alongside others has made us cry.

SILENCE

In your loving mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

God who smiles on us, we ask that we might know more of the joy that you alone can give.

We ask for the grace to trust you and obey you whatever the situation, whatever the cost.

We ask that we might come to know the eternal life of your kingdom of joy.

In the name of Jesus Christ, your living message of love and hope, **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

A closing thought: Reader 3

A closing thought to take with you, from the first Letter of Peter:

'You love Jesus Christ, although you have not seen him, and you believe in him, although you do not now see him. So you rejoice with a great and glorious joy which words cannot express, because you are receiving the salvation of your souls, which is the purpose of your faith in him.'

HYMN: You shall go out with joy–*StF 487; MP 796 OR* Joy to the world–*StF 330;H&P 77;MP 393*

Blessing: Leader 2 - A blessing from the letter to the Romans:

'May God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in him'.

And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
rest upon each one of us, now and evermore. **Amen.**