**Sunday, July 5th, 2020**

**Psalm 126:5**

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,

We were like those who dreamed.

Our mouths were filled with laughter.

Our tongues with songs of joy.

Then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."

The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.

The Word of The Lord.          **Thanks be to God**

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God has done great things for us.

We ought to be filled with joy and laughter.

But when times are difficult, we often have trouble finding joy in our lives.

Joy is important to God.

As we read through the Bible, we discover how often God speaks of joy.

The prophet Nehemiah said, "This day is holy to your God.

Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

And on that day, they offered great sacrifices,

rejoicing because God had given them great joy.

The women and children also rejoiced.

The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.

Jeremiah proclaimed: Then young women will dance and be glad,

young men and old as well.

I will turn their mourning into gladness;

I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.

God wants us to experience his peace, and his joy.

But we humans often have difficulty experiencing his joy,

when we find ourselves surrounded by chaos, fear and worry.

Tony in Rhode Island knew just how we feel.

Tony was a traffic police officer.

He enjoyed his job, as did his fellow traffic policemen.

However, neither he, nor any of the others on the traffic detail,

could endure the one hour each day when they were required

to stand in the middle of a busy intersection directing traffic.

Many of the crossroads did not have traffic lights, and during morning rush hour,

these intersections would become snarled with cars, and frustrated drivers.

So, the officers had to go and direct traffic.

They found this task so boring and uneventful; they could hardly endure it.

The boredom and frustration during that one hour carried over into the rest of the day.

Not one of these officers experienced any joy or happiness.

But Tony finally decided there had to be some way to improve the situation.

He was determined to spice up this dull task so the hour would go faster,

and not spoil his attitude for the whole day.

At home in the evenings, he began experimenting with

exaggerated hand and arm movements.

Then he began to add embellished body swings to go with the movements of his limbs.

Finally, after only a few days, he began twirling from left to right, and right to left.

He startled drivers with his flourishes of "hurry up," "slow down," or "stop!"

Motorists began to enjoy his antics.

Soon they were honking their horns in appreciation and clapping enthusiastically.

Before long he had so many enthusiastic fans,

that his "Intersection Ballet" was creating traffic jams.

To avoid the hazards his accumulation of fans presented,

Tony was assigned to a different intersection each day.

No one knew each morning exactly where he would be performing.

At first his fellow officers teased him unmercifully.

But before long they began to imitate him and join in the fun.

They discovered laughter and joy in the midst of the dull and boring.

They began to enjoy the dreadful hour directing traffic.

They found ways to help discouraged motorists get through rush hour

with smiles and laughter.

The change in their attitude made a big difference all day.

We have all experienced the frustration of snarled traffic.

It isn't any fun.

And yet, with God's help, we can adjust our attitude, at least a little,

by looking for ways to add some fun and laughter,

as we try to cope with the boredom and frustration.

When we stop concentrating on the worries, and doubts, and fears,

we are able to discover fun and joy in the middle of chaos.

The Bible is full of stories of God's people finding joy in difficult times.

Consider Noah spending 100 years building the ark,

and then spending all that time cooped up in the boat.

Think about Jonah sitting inside the whale's belly for days,

and the prayer he offered to God.

Remember Paul's joy even while he was suffering hardships and imprisonment.

These and many others, found joy in God's presence.

Even Jesus, as his time on the cross was quickly approaching,

said to his followers:

“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

We long for a break, in the discord and anger, the loneliness and isolation,

the frustration and anger.

But when we reach the end of our strength, wisdom, and patience,

We can turn to God and discover his joy.

As our world grows darker and more despondent, more violent,

more at odds with our ideals, dreams, and hopes, we find it hard to cope.

We need to take time out to find some laughter, some joy, in each day.

Passing that laughter on to another can make all the difference in the world.

The Bible tells us: A merry heart is good medicine.

Judging from what is happening all around us, I think we all need an extra-large dose.

Remember, laughter is contagious.

Seek out ways to make your friends and family smile.

Share your laughter with neighbors and strangers.

Let us pause often, and experience God's joy in our lives.

AMEN