Call to Worship

In the summertime, our minds and our spirits turn to relaxation and play. Jesus calls us to be like children in order to enter the kingdom of God. One characteristic of children is the ability to be completely immersed in their play. For those of us who are older, our spirits may be rejuvenated by our play.

Make our play today be holy, helping us experience joy!

Thoughts on Play, part Uno

Summertime invites playfulness. You who are kids now, are you looking forward to summer? The long days, weeks, even months that you don’t have stuff that you have to do every minute, every moment? Days at the pool…hanging out with friends…playing ball, playing music, playing make-believe, playing games, playing at being movie-makers, playing dress-up. Some for older kids, some for younger.

Those of you who are retirees: many of you are masters at play, I have noticed on Facebook and Instagram. You are experts at traveling all over the state, all over the country, all over the world, of finding joy in what you do.

Joy, that’s a good faith word. Joy is the second in the list of the Apostle Paul’s gifts of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, begins the list. Joy, then, is a fruit of living in God’s Spirit…and remember that today is Pentecost Sunday, in which we celebrate that God’s very own Spirit is poured out on us…and when we receive the Spirit, we
produce fruit in our lives that include love, joy, peace and more! Remember the joy.

As I thought about Holy Play, I did a word search in the bible, just for the word “play.” There’s not a lot there. But there are times when God is playful, in ways that we would not expect. One place is God’s speech in the book of Job where he talks about playing with giant animals like Behemoth and Leviathan. Can you do that, God asks the human Job. Can you even imagine that? Job doesn’t have much to say, except, no, you’re right, O Lord.

Most of what is found in the Hebrew bible, focuses on playing music...on playing music with joy, dancing with abandon (like Footloose King David dancing around the Ark of the Covenant), and then there is celebrating with various instruments, the veritable BC rock band.

Now, there is great joy in playing music. I have proof. In working in the office through the week, from time to time, I walk through the sanctuary while Karen is practicing. Now for her, that is her work, her vocation...but there is such joy for her, obviously, in the playing, and, for us, in the hearing, and in the moving to the music. Yes, United Methodists are not the frozen chosen...we can move to the music.

When I stop talking...I know, I know, you’re thinking “when will he ever stop talking?”...when I stop talking, we will play a little bit. First, we will sing and play a couple of songs that we have picked...but then we will play stump the band, as they did back in the day on the Tonight Show. Be ready to choose some of your favorite songs that we will then sing together, if you don’t stump the band!
A Time of Praise—2 songs and then “Your Choices” from the congregation

Scripture Reading: Mark 10: 13-16

Children’s Sermon

Time of Prayer

Special Music/Anthem

**Thoughts on Play, part B**

Our famous ancestor in our faith, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, was not, I repeat NOT, in favor of amusements, such as card-playing. Card-playing came in for special scrutiny for some reason, maybe because so many folks spent their lives on card-playing. He asked those who were going to be ordained as preachers, “Will you observe the following directions? a) Be diligent. Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly employed. Never trifle away time; neither spend any more time at any one place than is strictly necessary.” We get our dour side from Wesley.

On the other hand, a Dutch historian, by the name of Johan Huizinga, believed that we in western society were losing the ability to play and that there is no culture without play.¹ When we play, we open ourselves to that which is unordinary, which brings joy and hope, and opens us even that which is sacred. In a very real sense, what we do when we gather as Church has a playful nature to it, even the liturgy (what we do when we worship). It brings us out of that which is just the ordinary, to gather as a

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community, to experience God. There is joy in knowing of God’s presence, of beginning by playing at being forgiven, playing at having faith, of walking with God in the ordinary parts of our lives. It begins when we gather for worship and this, this is Holy Play.

Wesley also said about faith, which he picked up from Moravian Peter Bohler, “Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.” What he was saying, without saying it is to play at faith...until you have it. That’s how children learn...and we adults can learn from them. When we gather as God’s people, we practice at being God’s people, just like we may practice music, sports, or other activities.

Like a child playing dress-up as a doctor later becomes a doctor, so we dress up as a forgiven, faithful, hopeful people...until we become a forgiven, faithful, hopeful people. Holy Play.

There are many thoughts about what Jesus was honoring about a child when he said that no one can enter God’s kingdom without becoming like a child. Like a child, who loses herself in play, who learns by playing, who experiences joy in what seems like the mundane. Spending time with my one-year old grandson, James, reminds me of the joy of playing, of experiencing surprise, of just being in the moment, a lightness of being!

So, if what we are all about is in some way Holy Play, why can we not enjoy (that is, have joy) while we are at it? Laughter can open us to that which is sacred as well.

Another Gospel Reading: Matthew 5: 1-10

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2 “Don’t Do Ministry Without It,” Shane Raynor.
https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/1420/dont-do-ministry-without-it
Thoughts on Play, part 3

Play can be holy when it brings us together in community, when it lightens the burdens of our spirits, when it helps us to produce the fruit of the Spirit of joy. All of this can happen in the midst of worship...and in other times that we gather together. Our brand-new softball team (now on a one-game winning streak! Give a cheer!) has a sense of Holy Play about it...competing in such a way that it lightens and not burdens our spirits. We have played together in other settings, everything from B-I-N-G-O (say it with me, Bingo!)...to camera photo scavenger hunts...to carnival games...that has helped us to be closer to one another and has helped reach out to others to help them know of loving, graceful God.

Music, games and teams, swimming together whenever we finally get to have the youth over...even gardening in our courtyard and knitting & crocheting can be Holy Play. And, there is one more thing...playing with words, which we use so many of together. One way to play with words is humor...for example:

Here’s a question—Where is the first tennis match mentioned in the Bible?  A. When Joseph served in Pharaoh’s court.

Q:  Where was Solomon’s temple located?
   A. On the side of his head.

And, lastly, back to card-playing:

Q. Why didn’t they play cards on the Ark?
A. Because Noah was standing on the deck.³

A little humor for you there. As my brother would have told me, very little!

Other than puns that we take from the bible, there is also humor in the bible itself. I have often thought that Jesus had his tongue firmly planted in his cheek at times. Like when he said if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. You don’t think that he seriously meant to do that, do you? If so, why haven’t you done it? And, in the same passage, if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off! Better to do that than to end up on the “perpetually flaming trash heap.” Jesus often used the humor of hyperbole and exaggeration to get his point across.

An intriguing writer by the name of Gary Gagliardi, has studied the Koine Greek of the New Testament for years and he has discovered things that are often hidden in translation.⁴ In the Beatitudes that begin the Sermon on the Mount, he imagines Jesus’ humor as he spoke to hundreds who had gathered in the middle of nowhere to hear him.

Here is how he describes it the comic timing of Jesus, beginning with one word—“lucky,” he says Jesus said:

    here is where the pause is critical. After Christ says, "Lucky!" the pause gives the crowd time to think, "Who is lucky?"


⁴ “Christ’s Words in Greek—What is Hidden in Translation to English.” http://christswords.com/content/jesuss-humor
...[after the pause] "Beggars!"

This is a punch line. No one sees beggars as lucky and no one sees this word coming. ...

At this point, we need to imagine another pause as Christ waits for the giggles to die. Then Christ adds:

"For spirit."

Why are those who are beggars for spirit lucky? Another pause: “because the kingdom of heaven is made up of them.” Heaven is full of beggars. Hmmm.

So, it invites a fresh question for today. How are we beggars, needing a new spirit today?

There are many more tongue-in-cheek moments, humor even out of Jesus’ mouth. Exaggeration, hyperbole, surprise endings, catch phrases....all of these were tools in Jesus’ communication tool belt.

All in all, sometimes we Christians need to lighten up! Holy Play can help us to see the bible, the Jesus, and our faith with fresh eyes, experiencing the joy of God’s Spirit in our lives. So...Don’t forget the joy!

Offering/offertory

As we come to the offering, remember the joy. Often our giving is related as a duty, an onerous duty, just one more thing to such the joy out of life. That’s a shame, because giving is one of the most joyful acts that a Christian can do. Remember the joy!
Song/Hymn

Benediction

Remember the joy that comes through Holy Play, through music and games and having a playful spirit. Remember the joy that is bequeathed to us through the gift of God’s Holy Spirit this day!