

Looking for Joy

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2017

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Pastor: And now we come to the time of the service for the sermon. A time of utmost seriousness where we grapple with life and death, truth and deception, what is ultimate and what is eternal.

Adult Leader: Pastor [Name]?

Pastor: [Adult Leader's Name], what? It's...it's kind of a bad time. I mean, sermon...

Adult Leader: Oh, I know. And normally I wouldn't interrupt you here, but...really?

Pastor: Really what?

Adult Leader: I mean, it's not *totally* serious.

Pastor: [Adult Leader's Name], of course it's totally serious. This is our faith, our everything here.

Adult Leader: Well, yeah, but this is Eastertide! Jesus isn't dead, he is risen! And we had all those pretty Easter lilies and the kids in the cute dresses and little suits and family and friends and... The eggs and the chocolate – it's all so joyful!

Pastor: Well, yeah it's joyful, but serious joy. No jokes!

Adult Leader: No jokes? You tell jokes all the time in your sermons...

Pastor: I don't know what you're talking about. Not me; never! You know why?

Adult Leader: Why?

Pastor: Because, serious! Serious face.

Adult Leader: Are we reading the same scriptures? The Bible is full of people finding joy in God: through Christ, in the dancing of the Holy Spirit, coming together as church families, and bowling over with laughter and joy from the grace that washes over us.

Pastor: Well, sure there's joy, but it comes from discipline, repentance, prayer, forgiveness. It's hard work – serious work.

Adam & Eve

Adult Leader: Now, look, I'm gonna prove to you that Bible is full of joy – even from the very beginning. Here, in Genesis 2, starting at verse 4: In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵ when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up...⁷ then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Adam: (*pops up from behind something and yawns*) So, this is what being alive feels like. Neat! Let's see what kind of thing I am. (*Waves hand around*) What does this thing do? And why does it have bendy-looking bits on it? (*Experiments with bending fingers*) Woah, cool! My doodads can bend. That'll be soooo handy! (*laughs to himself*). I think I'm hilarious. I wonder if I have any other bendy parts. (*Experiments with wrists, elbows, and knees*) Wait...I've just invented something brilliant. (*Does the chicken dance and sings the tune to himself*)

God: Adam. (*keeps doing the chicken dance*) Adam! (*keeps doing the chicken dance*) Adam, you there! Only person who exists!

Adam: Me? Oh, am I Adam? I don't feel like an Adam...I thought maybe Stanley or, or Roderick.

God: I am the Lord your God, I formed you from the dust of the ground. The dirt is *adamah* and so I call you Adam.

Adam: (*sadly*) Wait, so you named me dirt man?

God: You are my creation and I love you.

Adam: Really? Thanks God. I love you, too! This being alive thing is pretty great so far. Hmm...if I'm a dirt man, then I guess it's my job to make mud pies! (*drops down to play in the dirt*)

God: My child, I have planted a vast and wonderful garden for you in Eden. It's full of every tree that is beautiful and the branches are heavy with the best tasting fruits.

Adam: Oh, so it's my job to eat fru-eet? All I see is dirt – I can eat mud pies!

God: Stop, silly person. Let me take you there and you'll see for yourself. (*Adam comes forward*) See the soft, green leaves and the light streaming through them? (*Adam keeps looking at the dirt*) Adam, look up! There is amazing beauty all around you.

Adam: (*gasps*) Wowzers! I can eat leaves?!

God: No, Adam, whatever is not brown like the tree trunk or green like the leaf, you can eat.

Adam: That's a lot of fru-eet. But I don't get to eat the granny smith apples?

God: No, you can eat those. Explore and enjoy yourself – try things out and be happy.

Adam: Golly, thanks!

God: But –

Adam: But?

God: It's your job to take care of the garden.

Adam: I will read it bedtime stories.

God: That's...nice, but actually, I was thinking –

Adam: I will shake all the branches up and down...to say hello!

God: That's not what gardening is.

Adam: Oh, so what is it?

God: Go to the river.

Adam: (*walks to the punch bowl*) What is that?

God: It's different from the land and it refreshes and restores the earth. And you...well, drink some!

Adam: (*starts to lap up water*) This is great!

God: We'll work on your table manners some other time. For now, all you need to know is that the garden loves that water just as much as you do.

Adam: Fantastic! Don't worry God, I can do this. Happy water, happy plants, happy Adam!

God: But there's one thing you need to know about the garden. The tree of life is in the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now, you remember that I told you that you can freely eat of every tree of the garden, but do not – are you listening to me on this? – do not ever eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Adam: Woah-kay, lots of information there. Umm...water good, trees good, evil fruit bad?

God: Right. If you eat that fruit you will die.

Adam: I have no idea what that means, but if you don't want me to do it, I won't do it – Adam's honor (*scout sign*).

God: You know Adam, I don't think it's good for you to be alone.

Adam: I'll always have you, God.

God: D'aww. You're so sweet. But I will make you a helper to have as your partner.

Adult Leader: ¹⁹ So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

Elephant: (*baby elephant march plays*) Hi, there, stranger.

Adam: Umm...hello. Have we met before?

Elephant: No, I would remember that.

Adam: Yeah, you sure are big! I bet you have an enormous brain for not forgetting things. And your legs are like tree trunks!

Elephant: (*sniff*) If you don't have anything nice to say...

Adam: No, no, it's not an insult. I'm impressed – it's a compliment. You also have a, umm, beautiful face pipe.

Elephant: Face pipe?

Adam: I'm gonna call you Nose Hose McStompy Pants.

Elephant: I do enjoy stomping. (*Stomps*) But I feel like that's an awful long name. Most people will have come and gone by the time they've said hello.

Adam: Yeah, I can see where there isn't much of a nickname for that one, Hosie.

Elephant: No. Just, no. But I like Ellie...

Adam: Okay, because you've been so nice, Ellie it is.

Elephant: Really? Really and truly? That makes me so happy I feel a little....woah (*faints into Adams arms*)

Adam: Ellie? Ellie?! You kind of aren't the lightest creature in the world here, hon. (*to the audience*) Well,whaddy know? Ellie faints...

Elephant: (*coming around*) Phew, thanks for catching me, Adam. I'm gonna go find some more yummy new fruit to try. Bye!

Adam: (*waves*) Bye, Ellie! I wonder who I'll meet next...

Dog: Hi! Hi, hi, hi!

Adam: Well, hello fluffy creature!

Dog: (*barks*) Can we be friends? We just met, but I really like you – I want to be best friends!

Adam: Okay. What do you like to do for fun?

Dog: Well, I like to chase stuff. In fact, there's this guy that keeps following me and so I try to grab him! (*chases tail; starts panting*) He's a wily little guy. But I think that (*starts talking softer*) if we're really quiet, I could sneak up on him. (*pounces unsuccessfully*). Shoot, I'll get him one of these days!

Adam: (*pets dog on the head*) I like you. You're silly. What else do you do for fun?

Dog: Have you ever tried smelling stuff because this is literally the best place ever for smells!

Adam: Smells?

Dog: Come on, you've got a face sniffer. Try it out! (*Adam and Dog both start sniffing; Dog enjoys it significantly more than Adam*)

Adam: (*giggles*) That might be more of a you thing than a me thing. What can we do together?

Dog: I know! I've got it now – you're gonna love this. We can dig!

Adam: Dig? Like in the dirt?

Dog: Uh-huh.

Adam: I LOVE it! (*they dig together*)

Dog: (*while digging, to himself*) Dig, dig, dig, dig, dig. Oh, boy, I love this! Dig, dig, dig, dig, dug!

Adam: That's it! I know your name. You are my dog.

Dog: Whippee! (*scampers off*) See you later, best friend for life!

Adam: Bye, dog!

Bird: (*flies around near Adam, wears a feather boa*) Tweet, tweet, tweet. Tweet, tweet tweet.

Adam: Well, hello there. What's your name?

Bird: You know, I have no idea. I mean, I wasn't and then I was and now here you are.

Adam: The same thing happened to me, too. Isn't it great? It's because God is so awesome, you know.

Bird: Well, God must love me because look at my fluffy feathers! And I'm so colorful, I will own the runway this season. (*strikes a pose*)

Adam: The what?

Bird: I have no idea. But look at these guys (*flaps arms like wings*)

Adam: Wow! You're like a pretty, singy, flap-flap!

Bird: Is that my name because I was hoping for something a little more chic.

Adam: Wait! Then you can be a chic-ken!

Bird: Chic-ken...I like it! (*starts to flap wings and dance a little*)

Adam: Oh, oh, oh! My dance! It's for you – check it out! (*they chicken dance together*) I am just having the best day here!

Adult Leader:²⁰ The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then God took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man was made into a woman and God brought her to the man.

Eve: (*Eve walks up to Adam*) Man, it was dark in there...wherever there was. Who are you?

Adam: I'm Adam.

Eve: You're dirt man?

Adam: Well, well, God made you from my rib so I could call you Rib Monster (*Eve makes a face*), Rib...lady? (*Eve makes a face*). Ooh, I know...how about Rib-becca?

Eve: Maybe we should stay away from rib-based names.

Adam: I'm Adam – you could be Adam-ita?

Eve: That sounds...just awful.

Adam: Yeah, you're right. I might have run out of all the good names. There are a lot of animals out there, ya know?

Eve: Yeah, I can see you've had your hands full. It's wonderful to see so much life all around – the cool shade, the prancing animals. It's a nice place you've got here.

Adam: Well...I was hoping you'd move in with me.

Eve: Woah, man! We just met!

Adam: That's it! Woah-man! That's what I'll call you.

Eve: I can live with that. But for now, let's get to know each other better. (*Adam and Eve hold hands, smile, and exit*)

Adult Leader: And they all lived happily ever after. The end.

Pastor: What? [Adult Leader's Name]...you're kidding me right?

Adult Leader: No, they were so happy together with all the animals and the babbling brook. It was just like a vacation in paradise.

Pastor: That is not the end of the story – at all! They disobey God, they eat the fruit, and get kicked out of the garden. Then they know death, and pain, and hard work.

Adult Leader: But before that, it was all joy and frolicking and talking elephants – like God intended!

Pastor: [Adult Leader's Name], I don't know what translation of the Bible you're reading, but I'm afraid that's not in the original Hebrew or the Aramaic or the Greek or, or...really...any Bible anywhere.

Adult Leader: Are you sure?

Pastor: Positive. In fact, most of the time when someone laughs in the Bible, they're laughing at someone else in that mean way or they are upset that they became a laughingstock.

Adult Leader: Well, that's not very nice.

Saul & David

Pastor: Well, let's see who's laughing now in 1 Samuel, chapters 16 through 18. You remember that God anointed Saul as king, but Saul wasn't patient enough to wait for the word of the Lord and decided to do things his own way instead. And so the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him.

(Saul storms in angrily)

Saul: My dear Wormwood, would you kindly get away from me? Yes, I see your horns and red tights, but, look – stop distracting me! I have a kingdom to run, you know! It's my kingdom and I am king. Say, when *did* you get those horns? They're so pointy. Point, point.

Servant: King Saul, pardon my saying so, but you seem to be tormented by an evil spirit.

Saul: Oh, you can see him, too?

Servant: No...but, well, you haven't been yourself lately.

Saul: Nonsense! If I could shut this little guy up for a moment or two, I'd be right as rain. He's such a chatterbox!

Servant: Forgive me for suggesting, my king, but what if you commanded your servant to look for someone who could play the lyre and, I don't know, maybe the music would help you feel better.

Saul: Liar. Liar?! You fool! I don't need anyone further to lie to me – I've got little Wormwood for that. *(waves to his shoulder demon)* Hello!

Servant: Ah. Yes, of course you don't want that. *(makes the crazy person sign to the congregation)*. What if we found someone who played nice, plinky-plonky music – like on a harp?

Saul: A concert? Brilliant suggestion – I’m glad I thought of it. Yes, servant, go find me a harpist who is as honest as the day is long; as steady as the moon in the sky; as plucky as a young cartoon duck.

Servant: Sire?

Saul: Go and quickly! (*calls after servant who is running out*) And make sure that they’re decent at it! Honestly, Wormwood, I don’t know what any of them would do without me – the first and, surely, greatest king of this land. Why, I’ll live to see my name in lights: Saul, No Last Name – but you know who we’re talkin’ about. I’m like Cher.

Servant: (*runs back in*) I just got word. There’s this guy, one of the sons of Jesse, and he’s brilliant on the harp. On top of that, he’s got courage, he’s a warrior, he...umm...knows when to hold his tongue. And he just...he’s the kind of guy who makes you look good to have him in your entourage.

Saul: Ooh, he sounds perfect. Bring him to me!

(*Servant runs off and returns with David*)

Saul: You – who the heck are you?

David: I am the youngest son of your servant Jesse – a mild-mannered shepherd who in no way resembles superman.

Saul: You, wah?

David: You called for me – to play for you?

Saul: Oh! You’re Harpo?

David: Harpo?

Saul: Groucho?

David: Huh?

Saul: Chico?

David (*to servant*): Is the evil spirit distracting him again, or what?

Servant: No, but be patient, he’s running out of Marx Brothers.

Saul: Well, fine. What do they call you at home?

David: I’m David, sir.

Saul: David, that's a good strong name. Care to play for me?

David: Gladly. (*Plays "Louie, Louie" on keyboard – 1, 4, 5 a few times*)

Saul: (*singing, dancing a bit*) Louie, Louie. Oh, baby, (*mumbles the line*), yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

Servant: I don't understand any of this.

Saul: Silence! He's perfect. Not only did the evil spirit calm down, but he does a mean duet. Then he goes for a smoke break. Win-win! So, Harpo?

David: David, sir.

Saul: Right, David? You're hired. I love you already. You'll be my armor-bearer.

David: Armor bear? You're going to wear me like armor?

Saul: No, Harpo, you're so silly. Armor bearer! When we go into battle, you will be my second and carry my sword and shield. And, ya know, your harp for in between skirmishes.

David: I pledge my loyalty to the king.

Saul: Sweet.

Pastor: And it was sweet for a time. But the Philistines were gaining in strength and numbers and they regularly attacked the people of Israel. It is at this point in the story where the mighty clash between David and Goliath took place. It was a battle fierce and mighty; a great story of courage and underdog heroism; a lesson of God's hand guiding history with powerful effect. And....we're not gonna act it out here.

David: (*slingshot in hand*) What, really?

Pastor: No, sorry, David.

David: But I really like this part!

Pastor: Again, sorry, but we can't tell all the stories. Well...at least not today. We'll come back to it some time.

David: You promise.

Pastor: Cross my heart.

David: Well, okay then.

Pastor: After that great victory, Saul sent David out into battle against the Philistines regularly. And every time David went out, leading troops, they were successful – every single time. Saul, by the way, did not have a 100% success rate leading troops. But David kept winning battle after battle.

David: *(to Saul)* I've just come back from the war.

Saul: Did you make it?

David: What?

Saul: Did you live? I sent you to a pretty hairy area.

David: Yes, I lived. I'm right here. Hello.

Saul: Oh, hi. Well, umm...good for you.

Servant: David! You're back. You were so amazing in that last battle. I heard so many stories.

Saul: Silence! You think you're so great. I think you're forgetting who's king around here.

David: Oh, no, sire. I know which one's king. You have that fancy hat to prove it.

Saul: Yes, it is an awesome crown and it's mine – not yours! My crown. And because I'm so great, I'm going to make you commander over all the army. And then all of your victories will be mine because.... *(waits for David to respond)* because...

David: Yes, because you're the king and you're great.

Saul: Thanks for noticing.

Pastor: So the next time that Saul sent David off to battle...

(Servant walks forward off the chancel with David)

Servant: Ladies and gentlemen of Israel, I give you – Commander David! Let's hear it for him!

(Adult Leader holds up applause sign)

Lady: David! David! Can I have your autograph? Would you kiss my baby? How do you do it?

David: Now, now...I'm just a man doing a job.

Lady: *(to herself)* Saul has conquered thousands, but David conquered ten thousands. Nyah, nyah, nyah. He's so dreamy. *(grabs hold of David's arm)*

David: Yes, very nice. (*tries to pry open Lady's grip*) I have to get back to the palace now. No? You're not letting go. Okay...you can come with me.

(*Servant, Lady, and David return to Saul's side*)

Saul: What is the meaning of all this?! I can barely hear my evil spirit!

David: My apologies, sire. It's just the people. They're, umm...celebrating your victory.

Saul: Yes, well, so they should be.

Lady (*loudly to Saul*): Saul has conquered thousands, but David conquered ten thousands. Nyah, nyah, nyah.

Saul: Harpo, it doesn't sound like they're celebrating my victory. It doesn't sound like they're celebrating my victory at all!

David: Please, king, deep breaths. Remember, "Louie, Louie"?

Saul: Enough of that, you treacherous worm! If they say that David conquered ten thousands and me only thousands, the next thing you know, they'll give him my crown!

Pastor: And from that day on, Saul eyed David. See what I'm saying, [Adult Leader's Name]? The townspeople had fun laughing at Saul and mocking him, but that did not so much bring about joy.

Adult Leader: Now, Pastor [Name], that was never real joy in the first place.

Pastor: Okay, you've got me there, but just like back then people today will settle for the mean-spirited giggle or the temporary joy rather than stick it out for the joy of the life abundant.

Adult Leader: Well, patience can be over-rated. We want to love and serve God right now, don't we? So things should move forward when we want them to.

Pastor: Yeah, but the Bible cautions us about getting carried away with impatience – especially when we're so busy chasing easy joy that we don't see where it's leading us.

Jeremiah and the Townsfolk

Pastor: We're gonna fast-forward a lot of years now from Saul's kingship in about 1046 BC to the time of the Babylonian Exile around 586 BC. We're looking at Jeremiah chapters 42 and 43. The unthinkable had happened – Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian army and was destroyed along with many other cities in Judah. Not only that – the Babylonians exiled the leaders of the Hebrew people to foreign cities in Babylon. This included religious and political leaders as well as people who were educated and skilled artisans. Most of the people who were left behind were peasants and they were poor. They did not know what their future would hold.

Johanah: Things look bleak, Azariah. I don't know how long we can keep the peace among the people.

Azariah: You're right, Johanah. It was so much easier to lead them into war – you know who the baddies are. They're the ones coming at you with weapons blazing. But now? All we have now is our faith and trust in the Lord our God.

Johanah: What we need to do is get all the people together – everyone who is left – and travel down to Egypt.

Azariah: Egypt?! Are you crazy? Our ancestors ran their tails off trying to get out of there. I know you know that story: Moses, Pharaoh, lightning, hail storms, raining frogs! I feel like this is not a great place for our people. I mean, frog rain?! With the slimy and the ribbits – and the hopping! It's madness, I tell you!

Johanah: Madness? What are you talking about? Egypt is the bread basket. Egypt has the river Nile and groves of trees and endless, endless food.

Azariah: I do like food.

Johanah: And do you know who isn't in Egypt?

Azariah: Who?

Johanan: The Babylonians who are trying to kill us – right here, right now.

Azariah: Oh, so...wait. Are we friends with the Egyptians now?

Johanan: Sure! The enemy of my enemy is my friend. They don't like the Babylonians any more than we do. We'll go down there and hide out. Everything will be great! We'll all have our own houses and be safe and happy. We could raise our families, see the pyramids. We'll be like tourists for a generation or two. Plus, I've got a cousin who fled down there and we could totally crash with him!

Azariah: And he has space for all of us?

Johanan: Sure, why not? And, the Egyptians have so many gods, they won't care how we worship the one, true God. Think of it! We can live and worship in peace!

Azariah: That does sound pretty sweet. And I hear they have perfume down there, which, I hate to break it to you, but...whew...you do *not* smell good.

Johanan: Then it's settled. Let's find Jeremiah. He's a great prophet. God speaks to him and he will tell us the way we should go.

Azariah: You're right. Jeremiah might be our last hope. And surely God will confirm what we've brilliantly figured out for ourselves. We're off to Egypt!

Johanan: (*to Jeremiah*) Jeremiah, be good enough to listen to our plea and pray to the Lord your God for us – for all of us left behind here. I mean, geez, there's only a few of us left. You can see for yourself! Let the Lord your God show us where we should go and what we should do.

Jeremiah: You're sure?

Johanan: Yes.

Azariah: Absolutely.

Jeremiah: I mean, whatever I say – whatever word I get from God, that's what you all want to do?

Azariah: Right.

Jeremiah: Not like last time? Or the time before? Or the time before? Okay, I have faith in you. I am going to pray to the Lord your God just like you asked me and whatever the Lord answers you I will tell you. I'm not gonna hold anything back at all.

Azariah: May God turn our donuts to bagels for the rest of our days if we don't do exactly what God tells us through you.

Johanah: If we have to hop on one leg for forty years or learn to salsa in the Dead Sea – whatever you say. If we like it – if we don't like it – we're gonna be true and faithful.

Azariah: Yeah, we'd be crazy not to listen to you! Things are bad enough already. We've totally learned our lesson and we want to make God so happy to have us lovable scamps as children.

Pastor: Ten days passed and the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. He gathered together all the leaders and all the people who were left behind, from the tallest to the smallest – from the proudest to the meekest – from the few fancy people left to the kids running in the street. He called all of them together to say:

Jeremiah: People! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, who you sent me to talk to. ¹⁰“If you will only remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I am sorry for the disaster that I have brought upon you.”

Azariah: Wait, what? Remain in this land?

Johanah: Don't worry about it. I'm sure that's nothing. Just wait – he's getting to the part where we stay in the land, make a sacrifice, have a few sandwiches, and we're off...to Egypt.

Azariah: That's gotta be it.

Jeremiah: As I was saying...it's the word of God here, guys. Show some respect.

Johanah: Sorry.

Azariah: Sorry.

Jeremiah: ¹¹“Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, as you have been ...for I am with you, to save you and to rescue you from his hand. ¹²I will grant you mercy, and he will have mercy on you and restore you to your native soil.

Azariah: Native soil? What does that mean?

Johanah: He's saying we'll get to go home.

Azariah: What, home? You mean no more beaches? No more perfume?

Johanah: I really don't smell that bad.

Azariah: Right...

Johanah: We can't stay here. We have to get these people down to Egypt. Why would Jeremiah tell us to stay?

Azariah: What, does he want us to keep living in a war zone and starve?

Jeremiah: ... ¹⁹ The LORD has said to you, O remnant of Judah, Do not go to Egypt. Be well aware that I have warned you today ²⁰ that you have made a fatal mistake. For you yourselves sent me to the LORD your God, saying, 'Pray for us to the LORD our God, and whatever the LORD our God says, tell us and we will do it.' ²¹ So I have told you today, but you have not obeyed the voice of the LORD your God in anything that God sent me to tell you. ²² Be well aware, then, that all the things you think you're running away from will catch up to you in Egypt.

Azariah: You liar!

Jeremiah: What?

Johanah: You told it wrong! I bet you never even talked to God at all.

Jeremiah: No, honestly guys, God said don't go to Egypt. Considering all the trouble God went through to get us out of there the last time, you'd think it wouldn't be so hard to convince you. You know, with the plagues?

Azariah: No, we've been over that. God loves us and that means God wants us to go to Egypt.

Jeremiah. You begged me. You pleaded with me.

Johanah: I have no memory of that.

Jeremiah: Yah-huh! You said that whatever word I gave you from God, bad or good, easy or hard, that you would do it.

Azariah: Well, not if it's the wrong thing. Obviously...

Johanah: I know; it's like Jeremiah's trying to unload time shares in Judah. We're not interested.

Jeremiah: But what about obeying the word of God, making God happy, trusting that God will see us through together?

Azariah: Ummm...I think I'd rather go tubing down the Nile.

Johanah: Aren't there crocodiles in the Nile?

Azariah: Or is it alligators? Well, I'll pray for God to protect me. This is gonna be so awesome!

Johanah: Right? Road trip!

Pastor: Not surprisingly, things did not end well for them. They went to Egypt and the Babylonians invaded there, too. More than that, as soon as they got around the “safety” of all those Egyptian gods, they started worshipping them instead of the God of Israel.

Adult Leader: That’s awful!

Pastor: Yeah, sometimes that easy joy just explodes into catastrophe. That’s why it’s better to trust the serious stuff of God.

Adult Leader: Oh, come on, Pastor [Name]. There’s lots of real joy that comes straight from God that we can connect with in our everyday lives.

Pastor: Like what?

Loaves & Fishes

Adult Leader: Well, God’s grace and love and mercy are all over the Bible, but if I have to pick one story about the joy of God’s grace, I’m going with Luke chapter 9. Jesus sent his twelve apostles out to spread the Gospel, to cure diseases and to cast out demons.

Jesus: Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money – not even an extra tunic.

(Peter raises his hand)

Jesus: Yes, Peter? What is it?

Peter: John has a question.

John: No, I don’t. You mean my brother, James.

James: Okay, yeah. We don’t take anything at all?

Jesus: Trust in God for God provides all things.

James: But, but...Jesus, I can’t go naked.

John: Ha!

Jesus: John, please. James, you can wear your clothes. I said no extra tunic. But your regular tunic is alright.

James: Oh, thanks, Jesus. I just want to do a good job. *(glares at John)* And some people aren’t helping.

John: Sorry, James. Sorry, Jesus.

Jesus: Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.

Adult Leader: So they followed Jesus' words and went off to different villages. They proclaimed the kingdom of God wherever they went.

(Peter, James, and John, come off the chancel at three different spots)

Peter: Friends, quiet your hearts and hear a word from Jesus: "Do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

James: People who feel beaten down, our Lord and Savior said to me: "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."

John: You who starve and seek better, hear the hope of your messiah: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Adult Leader: When the apostles came back, they told Jesus all about what they had done.

Peter: Jesus, it was so amazing to tell people about you.

James: Yeah, I must have healed 30 people.

John: Well, I'm sure I healed 50 people.

James: Geez, John, it's not a competition.

John: Not for you – I won.

James: John!

Jesus: Peace, children. You still have much to learn.

Peter: Master, I see the crowds coming. Will you teach more today?

Jesus: Gather round and listen: "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the

lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”¹⁵ One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

Adult Leader: And Jesus continued to speak about the kingdom of God and he healed those who needed to be cured. As the day was drawing to a close...

Peter: Jesus, it's getting a bit late.

Jesus: Indeed, it is Peter.

Peter: Don't you think it's about time to send everybody home?

John: Yeah, some of them came from nearby villages and the countryside. They'll need to find places to sleep and food to eat.

James: No offense, Jesus, but we're kinda in the middle of nowhere.

Jesus: You give them something to eat.

James: What, me? I don't have any food...

John: No, that was you plural.

James: Wait...you plural? Ya'll? Is Jesus southern?

Peter: Well, he was born in sort of Mid-West Israel, spent a little time in Egypt and then was raised in the North.

James: So how come “ya'll”?

Jesus: Friends, the people are hungry. You give them something to eat.

Peter: You heard the man. Cough up your stash everybody. No holding back from our Lord and Savior. I have a fish and a loaf from my host parents. They gave me a nice little doggie bag when I left this morning.

James: Well, I've got three loaves that I made while I was waiting for John to come back. Honestly, John, even as a child you were always late.

John: Would ya just drop it already, James? I have a fish and a loaf, too. So, what does that leave us with?

Peter: Umm...five loaves and two fish. That...is not enough to feed this crowd. There's got to be at least 5,000 people out there! Okay, someone needs to do a grocery run.

James: Look, Peter, not everyone comes from money like you do.

John: Well, but if you buy in bulk...

Jesus: Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.

Peter: Okay, Jesus, but you know we haven't been to the store yet.

Jesus: Have faith, Peter.

John: Hey everybody! Find your buddy. Yes, you and 49 of your closest friends. There you go.
In tight; together now. Good, good!

James: John would've made a great stage manager....

Adult Leader: And then Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.

(Jesus breaks a loaf. Peter, James, and John each take a basket of goldfish crackers and pass them out to the congregation and the choir; up-tempo music plays as they are passed out.)

Adult Leader: And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces. Can you imagine the joy on that day? Every single person who showed up – whether they were kind or mean, whether they believed or not – they all received a blessing from our Lord and Savior. That's a joy that we get when we worship here and that's a joy we can remember every day.

Pastor: You know what, Sue? I think you're right. All real joy comes from God and we would be nuts to skip out on that joy while we're alive. In John chapter 16, Jesus tells us, "So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." There is a time to laugh and God bless holy humor. Amen.