

[PRAYER] [BLANK] Good morning. For those who were able to come out in the warm weather this morning, I say, “Thank you!” Just remember - six months from now, when we are shivering, we may not look at a day like today in such a bad light. In spite of everything, summer days are a grace. God’s joy comes in all shapes and sizes, and we need to be willing to focus on it when it’s what we need, even when it may not be what we want.

In my house, focusing on what we need, instead of what we want, is not always the easiest thing. I want to do some gardening, or maybe just kick back and watch a ball game now and again. And, sometimes, I do. But what I need to do is to serve God, our church, and my family. I want to have my office nice and neat, but what I need is time to get out the next sermon, or worship slides. And as much as we may want to try out all sorts of pet food on our cats, I can report, as the person who cleans the litter boxes, that what we need to do is to buy just the food that they can handle!

That’s the problem with life, isn’t it? We have an awful lot of freedom in life to do what we want, but we don’t always use our freedom to do what we need to do. We can focus our freedom wherever we want. We can choose to do our own thing, or choose unity in Christ that brings us God’s joy. We can choose to put off commitments that bring God’s joy, or commit to seeking out God’s joy now, persistently, and insistently. And to do this, we need to focus on the things that help us to see how God wants to feed us, that really help us to see and to hear what God wants us to see, and to hear.

The 50th anniversary of the first humans landing on the moon was early this morning, our time. We’ve already looked at how it took enormous commitment from everyone on the Apollo 11 mission team to bring the unifying joy of that moment to everyone in the world. On the actual day of the landing, it came down to what two people could do, strapped into a very delicate machine, 250 thousand miles away, with everything that people had done to bring them there.

[ALARM] As Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin began to pilot their spacecraft to the surface of the moon, it didn’t look good for them, at all. Their landing radar wasn’t working right. Somehow that problem was causing their tiny computer to get overloaded with data, and it started popping out strange error messages, beeping out alarms, again and again. And as they came close to the surface of the moon, they could see that these problems had put them on course for crashing into a huge crater. Armstrong took over the controls to fly the spacecraft manually, and landed it perfectly, with just a few seconds of fuel left. [BLANK]

Can you imagine the focus that he had to have to do this? Using a machine that had never landed safely anywhere, much less on the moon, which was working far from perfectly, with everything that could blink and beep telling him to give up and go home, Armstrong just kept on going. He was focused completely on trying to do what he needed to do, until he absolutely couldn’t do it anymore. That’s what it took to bring real joy to him, and to the world. If we focus on finding joy, joy is what we’ll find.

Now, we’re not Neil Armstrong, by a long shot. We don’t have billions of dollars

helping us to reach amazing goals that bring joy. We don't have a mission control team watching our every move, monitoring everything that could go wrong in our lives. We don't have insights from big computers and monitors to tell us what to do. No, we don't have any of these things that the astronauts had.

But what we do have is a God who helps us to focus on what really brings us joy; a God who feeds us everything we need to find God's joy; a God who is talking to us constantly about what will bring us to God's joy. You don't have to be an astronaut, or a rocket scientist, or a pastor, or a saint to find God's joy. All you have to be is to be willing to use the freedom that God has given you to focus on God's joy as your first priority in life, again and again, until seeking it becomes the core of who you are.

And if we need help to focus on God's joy, we can rest assured that we're not alone. We see in today's readings that even the people who knew God very well had a hard time figuring out what God wanted them to focus on. In Genesis today we hear the story of Abraham, the father of many ancient nations. God promised him that he and his wife, Sarah, would have more descendants than stars that he could count in the sky. And yet, several years later, when he and Sarah were very old, Abraham was shocked when three visitors from heaven appeared at the doorway of his tent. Abraham scurried around, trying to be a good host for these visitors. His visitors were unimpressed. When Abraham offered to get them some bread to feel stronger, They replied, “Fine. Do just as you have said.”

God's messengers didn't want to discourage Abraham from trying to do good things. But they knew that he was missing the point of their visit. Abraham was focused on giving things to God that he felt obligated to give. But God was focused on giving Sarah good news. She would finally have the child that God had promised them. All they had to do was to focus on the joy of God's good news.

Many years later, Luke's gospel tells us that two women who followed Jesus had a similar experience. Two sisters welcomed Jesus and his followers into their home for a meal. Like Abraham, Martha was scurrying around, trying to get a good meal ready for Jesus, and for everyone who followed him. You can almost hear the pots clanging around in her kitchen, can't you? I know that there's been more than one dinner like this in this church, times when everyone pitched in to make a meal as perfect as possible.

And yet, in the middle of our busy-ness, we forget to focus on who really feeds people in God's church. It's not us. It's Jesus. When we feed people a good meal, Jesus is there with us, saying, like the angels who visited Abraham, “Fine, Do just as you have said.” Jesus did not put down Martha for wanting to put out a fine meal. But Jesus did point out to her that she was distracted from the one thing that was needed. Martha was focused on giving Jesus and his followers a fine meal. Her sister, Mary, was focused in being fed by the love and the words of Jesus. Mary was already focused on feasting on the good news of Jesus.

You see, the most important meal had already been served. Jesus was the meal. Jesus is the bread of life, given freely, by God. When we celebrate communion, we use a simple piece of bread, and a simple cup of juice, our feast in Jesus. One thing is needed for

God’s joy. And that one thing is Jesus, in us, with us, for us, and for God’s world.

[HOUSE] When I was in Puerto Rico for my mission trip a few weeks ago, the family who lived there came to see us finishing the work that we had come to do. They were very moved to see their house, which had been ripped apart by hurricane Maria, becoming a home again. I offered to bless the house for them if they would like, and they agreed. [MEAL] The wife and mother of the family prepared a wonderful meal for the workers and the family members who came for the blessing. It was a wonderful feast. But before that feast, we feasted on Jesus. I offered them a simple message to them in the little Spanish that I know, and then I anointed their house, and them, with oil, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We focused first on feasting on Jesus, God’s living Word. We feasted on the living presence of God’s Holy Spirit. And, then, we had a joyful meal. [BLANK]

We can focus on a lot of things as a church. We can focus on a lot of things in our lives. But only one thing is needed as our focus to find God’s joy. Only one thing is needed to feed our joy in God. The one thing is...Jesus. Focus on the source of our joy: Jesus Christ, Son of God, and son of Humanity, the everlasting source of our salvation. God has given us a beautiful world in which to focus on Jesus. God has given us God’s powerful Holy Spirit to help us to become united and committed to focusing on Jesus. We are free to choose our aches, our pains, our grief, our regrets, our empty passions, as our gods, on any given day. And we are just as free to choose Jesus, our heavenly feast, ready to feed our hearts, our minds, our spirits, and our bodies, with heavenly food, food that God gives us as the joy of God’s good news, now, and forever. Choose to focus on God’s one thing that is needed. Choose Jesus. Choose Jesus today, and always, and serve Jesus, to yourself, to your church, and to God’s world. Amen.