

“Lukewarm or Lukehot?”
Luke 6:17-26 (Jesus talks about those who are blessed.)
Acts 2:1-4 (Pentecost described!)

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There once was a church that had only party rooms: the Choir Party Room, the Youth Party Room, the Education and the Administrative Party Rooms. In the largest room on campus there was a communion table and a cross. The congregation called that God’s Party Room.

This congregation radiated joy. Members from other congregations came to take a look and were shocked when they saw this congregation having so much fun during worship—stomping their feet, for example.

“Sacriligious,” said some. The people in this church just smiled and went right on doing things like having First Friday Family Fun nights and Church picnics right on their campus at the end of the summer, to warm things up again for fall. They wore Aloha wear during the summertime.

At a Church Council meeting a leader asked, “Are we taking God and our faith seriously enough?”

“We are,” said the people. “God gave us the Holy Spirit and that is something to celebrate! We are celebrants of the gift of Life. We are community. We are trying to do justice and to love. We are overjoyed that we can be the church, a community of people, who are many, yet one—who walk together and welcome any who would walk with us. When we weep, there is someone to weep with us and affirm us. When we see injustices, we must be about God’s business of speaking up, of getting educated about what is happening. When we don’t live up to our faith, we have God’s forgiveness. Isn’t it remarkable that *we can be God’s good news*? Is it any wonder we have a church full of party rooms? There is so much to celebrate!”

This is a fictional story, a legend, so to speak—intended to get our attention, to challenge us as a Christian congregation: Are we celebrating enough? Quite an odd challenge, isn’t it? Are we joyous enough?

There’s another story, a historical narrative, which really is not so different.

John the Baptist had predicted it. (Luke 3:16) Jesus predicted it. (Acts 1:4-5) Expectations were high. Yet only Luke, of all the biblical writers, includes this event—and it is recorded in four little verses in *The Book of Acts*, which the author of Luke wrote.¹ It is a story of *how and when* the followers of Jesus came to be “The Church.”

They were gathered together in one place coming from long distances for one of the three annual Jewish pilgrimage feasts.² This celebration was already on the synagogue calendar. People had put it into their blackberries. It was exactly 50 days after Passover. *The purpose of this pilgrimage feast was to celebrate the goodness of God toward them. It was a grateful gathering.*

What had been predicted did happen: The whole community became inspired by God’s spirit. Well, that’s putting it mildly. They were “on fire” with the Spirit. (That fire with the tongues inspires our United Methodist Church logo, with the flames by the

cross.) Luke was so impressed with the Pentecost happenings that he spared no Hollywood special effect in his. He wrote that it was as if giant winds of God's breath blew through the crowd. Every Gospel writer—Matthew, Mark, John, Luke—had their own major theme—a lens through which they saw the Jesus events. Luke's theme was "The Spirit's Here Now!" Luke describes Jesus' disciples as uniquely Spirit-filled people!

In other words, for Luke, Christians were not lukewarm. They were Lukehot.

We have heard a fictional story about a Party Church and a historical narrative about the powerful Pentecost gathering. In chapter 6 of the *Gospel of Luke* we find yet another celebratory get-together: Here Jesus is preaching what became known as "the Sermon on the Plain." We are more familiar with his Sermon on the Mount, which is in the Gospel of Matthew and is longer. Jesus lets his parishioners out earlier with this sermon, in Luke, Chapter 6, for he omits a lot of what was of interest to Matthew.³ Luke cares—a lot—about *the Spirit...and Spirit-filledness*; he wanted **Lukehot** Christians--Christians with zeal!

In this Sermon on the Plain ("PLAIN") Jesus names four sets of people who do not seem to have much going for them and he speaks directly to these people, telling them that in actuality, *they were blessed and should also be joyous*.⁴ Jesus says "Blessed are YOU who are poor, Blessed are YOU who are hungry now, Blessed are YOU who weep, and Blessed are YOU who are hated or excluded on account of me."

That's a strange sermon. Picture this: Jesus is standing there with this eager crowd, on the plain, the level area, after Jesus has come down the mountain. Standing there, Jesus preaches a scandalous message that literally turns over every conventional expectation.

When you think about it, this story sounds more fictional than the story about the Partying Congregation I started with.

Let's be clear, Jesus was not saying that it is great to be hungry, poor, sad or rejected. No.

Jesus says that God promises that those who are hungry, poor, mourning, sad, rejected . . . will be blessed, will find blessings. On earth.

The Kingdom of God on earth is most clearly described by the word "joy."⁵ Luke uses the word "joy" repeatedly. Since Luke's theme is the spirit-filled-ness of Jesus followers, it is not surprising that he keeps saying how joyous they are--or ought to be. We're included in this group called "Jesus followers." Luke keeps saying how joyous **we are**--or could be. Isn't it crazy that people sometimes think of people who go to church as somehow limiting their joy? (The author of Luke would not like the press the Puritans gave to Christianity.)

Jesus says these people--the poor, hungry, rejected--are blessed because God is with them and promises them help. . . **Guess where and what God's tools for change are?**

The Church--that's you and me!

Jesus was not saying the satisfied, happy, wealthy or powerful were not good people. (I was tempted to end the scripture passage to be read before we got to this point, but knew I needed to be fair and include this.) However, when things are very good, we tend to get preoccupied with keeping things as they are rather than being open to the blowing of the BIG WIND of the spirit which may be prompting some kind of change.

We can sometimes get sort of *Lukewarm to the Big Wind* because we kind of would like to stay put.

When we need others--God and the church--we are not as attached to the present, so we are truly open to the BIG WIND, we're willing to be *Lukehot*, that is, completely dependent upon God.

Since I began contemplating this sermon, I have been asking myself when I have experienced a sense of joy, being blown over with the power of the Spirit of God, here, in this place. I recommend that you consider that question for yourself.

Though I thoroughly enjoy Sunday morning worship and our monthly Taize worship and I often come back to the office and say to Karen after visiting one of you in the hospital or at home, "What a wonderful visit!"⁶ the experience that came to me as an answer to my question about joy here was an event we called a "mini-summit" between our music leaders and our children's education leaders. It's an ad-hoc group. We met only twice, a month apart, in order to consider our current situation and to envision what might work better in the future. The first meeting went quite well--we listed 17 ideas that might improve our care for children around here--through Sunday School and the arts. But I admit I was nervous about our second meeting. I knew we might actually be *making* some decisions, not just brainstorming. And, for sure or decisions would mean change, for we had all agreed change of some kind was necessary. None of us seemed to be lobbying for a particular solution. In fact, my fear was that there *was no answer that would emerge*. We would be stuck, immobilized. Silly me. During this meeting, just a couple weeks ago, the Wind of the Spirit blew and whew, we came up with a unanimous agreement to make some pretty drastic changes. And we are all excited, even *Lukehot*, over what might happen here!

I confess that I LOVE events like that (especially after the event is over). I LOVE being with people who have sheer good will toward each other, who are together on a level playing field, and who are all receptive to the workings of the Divine Spirit as we seek to discern some solution to a question that matters.

When I heard Wendy and the *Inland Master Chorale* sing that song, "Dig a Little Deeper," about a month ago I was moved spiritually. Isn't our quest as spirit-led people to constantly "dig a little deeper," to "find out who we are?" And isn't it helpful to hear the grace-filled encouragement that "it really aint' that far" that we have to dig?

In that song, what is "guaranteed" "when we find out who we are"? Blue skies and sunshine--in other words, "joy," exactly what the author of Luke expected us all to have because we have each other and God in our midst.

A couple months ago the singer Paul Simon released a new CD. The title song is "So Beautiful or So What..." The refrain is this: "Life is what you make of it--so beautiful or so what." The lyrics ring so true. We are sometimes in situations--due to depression or physical problems or job losses--in which we feel "so what?" Yet, if we stay focused on our connection with others and with God, and if we go through that stage, we very often can arrive at joy in living again. In other words, the "norm" of life, from our Christian viewpoint, is joy. We do not have a cynical faith.

Today we read together what I called a Pentecost Prayer from Thomas a Kempis.⁷ It's a prayer, not a demand. "Turn my mourning into joy, my wandering feet onto the right path, my ignorance into knowledge of your truth, my **lukewarmness** into zeal... my fear into love...." May we experience the prayer and its fruits. Amen.

¹ Luke wrote the Book of Acts, or the author of Luke was also the author of Acts.

² The Feast of Weeks

³ The author of the Gospel of Matthew spoke mostly to Jewish Christians, so he was more concerned about the Law. Luke, in Chapter 6, did not care much about the law.

⁴ Unlike Matthew, Luke doesn't say that "they" are blessed

⁵ As in Psalm 126—when those who are now overburdened will have joy and laughter.

⁶ And I'm really "Lukehot" when John and I have gone to Joshua Tree to serve breakfast with the homeless there.

⁷ Thomas a Kempis was a writer and copyist. He is probably the author of the famous book, *The Imitation of Christ*.