

These past few weeks, we've been talking about comedic joy, how the comedy that is the gospel ends in a happy ending. The Gospel is a comedy that reshapes everything that we do and believe as Christians. The Easter message of the empty tomb and Christ Risen changes how we look at life.

But for many of us, perhaps we'd say this is all well and good. But what about me? We don't always have joy and humor and happiness. Today is good shepherd Sunday. And we focus on comedic joy, but we also focus on the Good Shepherd, who shepherds us even through our worst moments, through depression, anxiety, sorrow and times when that joy of the gospel really just doesn't shine through. So today, we're going to talk about three things that we can learn about comedic joy, even in bittersweet circumstances. First, 3. Comedic joy keeps in mind the whole counsel of God.

Our text for the day is based off of our first reading, Acts chapter 20. We're going to see Paul—one of the most prolific, one of the most successful missionaries in the history of the church—meeting with the elders of the Church of Ephesus for the last time this side of heaven. We hear the speech he gives to the elders, and it is certainly one that is sorrowful and filled with tears.

And I'll argue that even despite this sorrow, there is a comedic joy—a quiet serenity and peace that shines behind the words of the page. Paul tells the elders, **“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”**

Yet we shrink from a passage like this. The whole counsel of God means that a pastor teaches everything that the Bible teaches, which is all well and good until the Bible condemns us. We want a pastor so we can feel good, not that we can be accused or have wrongdoing pointed out.

One of President Harrison's chapters in his book is The Joys of a Faithful Pastor. And he talks about how a faithful pastor sometimes is going to have to say difficult things. For example, he writes on page 116, “Sorry, Carl! You and your girlfriend may be seventy years old, but shacking up is wrong, I don't care what the income tax ramifications are!” What a hard thing to address for the couple who are living together apart from marriage.

The pastor sometimes has to bring bad news, has to tell people they're dying. No, not necessarily of cancer or some other kind of illness that's physical, but a spiritual cancer. And because of this we need to be in church, we need to be continually receiving forgiveness of sins.

The Christian walk involves sometimes saying no to sin, sometimes calling out sin. And that's not always fun. It's not always fun to call someone to repentance. Yet the Bible tells us to preach the whole counsel of God. We don't get to pick and choose which parts of the Bible we want to hear and which parts we don't.

Friedrich Wyneken was a founding father of the LCMS. Who got off of a boat from Germany and landed in Baltimore and then was tasked to start mission plants in the western frontier. In those days, it was far flung places like Indiana or Ohio—not quite as far as California or Nevada. So he went alone, often riding a horse in the middle of nowhere. And he had chances that he could have maybe teamed up with other Christians that were already on the ground: Catholics, Methodists, you name it. But he chose not to compromise the whole counsel of God. He chose to be distinctively Lutheran. It wasn't always easy work, but he answered the call.

When we consider our lives perhaps we struggle with bouts of depression and melancholy. The first step is to listen to the whole counsel of God. Understand that perhaps there's something that we're not listening to. Perhaps there is there is a sin that we're caught in that could be contributing to some of this depression and sorrow.

Believe the whole counsel of God. Believe that you are His beloved son or daughter, that you have been washed pure in the blood of the lamb. Cleansed. Forgiven. Having the hope of eternal life. We have the privilege of hearing the whole counsel of God, which certainly does have tough parts. But also has beautiful parts. And the more we know the whole of God's Word, we understand how much we are forgiven, how much we are loved, and how much our Savior has done for us.

On this mothers' day, we hear the words of the Psalmist who writes, **“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.”** Being a mom is hard work, and the hard work doesn't end even if your kids are grown up. When we hear the whole counsel of God, we are encouraged that children are indeed a blessing from the Lord, and more than that, we read in Proverbs that wise children cause a mother to rejoice. May we always rejoice in the gift of children, even when the going gets tough!

Our next point is 2. Comedic joy flows from putting one foot in front of the other. I've heard some advice from a pastor that my job as a pastor is not to push the boulder up to the top of the hill. My job is just to push the boulder. When there's times when I face difficulties in my ministry, it's not my job to see that someone repents of his or her sin. That's the Holy Spirit's job. It's not my job to get every pew filled on a Sunday morning. It's certainly my job to invite, but it's ultimately up to those who we invite whether they come or not. It's not my job to change people's hearts. And neither it is yours, right? It's not your job to change people's hearts.

So what can you do? You can do those basic things that God has told you to do. You can go to the places where He has promised that he will be. And that's where joy is found. Even if it doesn't feel like joy. God promises to be in his Word

and Sacrament. He promises to hear us when we pray. He promises that those who labor in Christ do not labor in vain. So whether you're a pastor or you're a lay leader or you're just an everyday parishioner with no title. God calls us to stay in these basic things one step at a time.

Friedrich Wyneken struggled with depression from childhood. He eventually retired early and moved to California, where the warmer weather might be able to cheer his spirits. Ultimately that didn't work, and he still struggled with depression all his life.

Yet what do we do when we're sad? What do we do when we don't feel that joy of the gospel? Take one step in front of the other. What's the next right thing I can do? Some days you'll just roll out of bed and you'll say some basic prayers like, "Jesus, help me get through this day." Or recite a familiar Bible passage or two for encouragement. Maybe on some days, that's all you can do. You can't read your devotion. You can't pray through your prayer list, but every step is one foot forward.

Focus on what God has given you, focus on the joy that is before you, even if it's just a little spark. Even on a bad day, God is working. Even on a bad day we want you here at church and the community of God's people to cast your cares upon Christ because He cares for you. It might not look like an overnight transformation. It might be filled with tears. But progress happens one step at a time.

On this day we acknowledge we weren't always easy to raise. We give thanks to God for the gift of mothers who helped raise us as they placed one foot in front of the other. How much of being a mother involves taking things one step at a time and going forward with the grace and forgiveness of God for when you fall short!

Finally, 1. Comedic joy flows from keeping the end in mind. Friedrich Wyneken did eventually die, and they took his body back to Fort Wayne that they could have his funeral. And although he had many struggles in his life. There was a flock all surrounding him that were touched by his life, touched by his ministry.

Even on the days when he didn't feel joyful, he could share joy with others. Even on days when he didn't feel it, he could still be the presence of Christ to his flock at the death of a loved one, in a classroom, or in a church service.

And so look at the end. All throughout his life, there were many people rejoicing at the ministry of Wyneken—rejoicing because he took a leap of faith leaving Germany to go to America to spread the gospel to Lutherans who didn't have a pastor. Wyneken ministered to Christians whose kids were unbaptized not for lack of desire, but for lack of a pastor. Wyneken those who were dying and hadn't had a pastor to commune them in years. Many people rejoiced because of Wyneken's ministry.

As we look at our lives, it might be hard to imagine how we could possibly ever feel better again or how we're ever going to feel normal again after so much has happened in our life. Or how we can feel comedic joy on days when we're just stuck in the doldrums.

COMEDIC JOY FLOWS FROM THE REALITY OF THE GOSPEL, EVEN IF YOU DON'T FEEL IT. Comedic joy flows from the fact that whether you have a strong faith or a weak faith, Christ is going to rescue you on the last day just as the father rescued Christ from the grave. Comedic joy flows from the reality that you have the promise of heaven. You have the promise of those sins that you just can't shake being taken from you on that day. Set your eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith.

In our text Paul declared, **“And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.”** Yet Paul went down this path willingly knowing God is in control.

Dear Christian friend. Don't shrink away from the path that God has taken you on. It might be difficult, but keep the end in mind. You have comedic joy knowing you're on the path that God has set you on, that it will not end in sorrow, but rather, the joy of knowing that life has a happy ending. Even if there is sorrow in the between.

Be confident that you're in the right place, even when it feels wrong. It's never the wrong place to be doing God's will according to the Ten Commandments. It's never the wrong place to be in church to gather with fellow Christians and to sing hymns and to receive Christ's body and blood. It's never wrong to share your faith, even if people slam the door in your face. Mothers, it's never the wrong place to be changing diapers and sitting at the sidelines of your kid's soccer game. These are the right places to be. Because of Easter, we can have comedic joy. Even when we don't feel it, we have happiness waiting for us, even in the pits of sorrow. We have a good shepherd who shepherds us all the way. Amen.