

Renewal Worship June 5, 2011

Bria Stevens, Cynthia Wold, Holly Klamann & Kathy Glass

2 Timothy 1: 4-7; Hebrews 11: 1-3; Luke 11: 33-36

James 1: 2-3; Galatians 5: 22-23; Romans 15: 13

Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

“Fun” by Bria Stevens

When the Renewal Leave & Worship Committee got together, it was difficult to choose scripture for fun, but there were 2 things about the theme of fun that we all immediately agreed on:

- 1) Fun should be the theme that begins the service
- 2) Fun should be the theme that involves the Children’s Time because the kids in this church are the epitome of what fun means to us

It is significant that we positioned fun in the beginning our worship together this morning because as Pastor Kelly pointed out in her sermon a few months ago, too often in our work and success driven culture, we put off fun as a reward for hard work. We save vacations until the end of the year; we wait to do the things we enjoy until the end of the week.

I think our committees are on to something here – fun should *not* be pushed aside in our lives because more than just making time for activities that bring us happiness, fun is spirit of joy – a gift from God – a gift that we are called to cultivate in order to have the energy to sustain us and keep us healthy for our real purpose on this earth: to love and serve God and to love and serve one another through the grace we have been given.

We are called to use this spirit of joy as a lens with which we view each day, focusing us away from the distractions of the world and anchoring us to focus on our faith.

I believe we have been created by a joyful, fun loving and creative God; we have been made in this image.

You know that hymn we sing “God the Sculptor of the Mountains?” I love that hymn, but I think it stops short because God is more fun than just a mountain maker. God is the sculptor of the ant eater! the Aurora Borealis! the naked mole rat! Steve Martin! God has a sense of humor.

And God found such joy and beauty in the creation of this earth and in us that he became human in Christ Jesus. We know the reality of Christ’s journey on earth – his death and resurrection. In each of Pastor Kelly’s letters to the congregation, she defined what each theme means to her, but she also included what the term did *not* mean. In the same way, I think it is important to note that this spirit of fun and joy which we are called to nurture is *not* a blind optimism – not a pop psychology kind of “positive thinking.” We all know that part of being human can involve suffering and pain – loneliness – broken relationships – illness. Because of these parts of being human, finding the joy of Christ in all moments is a process we must give attention to each day.

In the scripture from Paul’s letter to Timothy that Mary read this morning, Paul calls Timothy and calls us to rekindle the gift of God, to rekindle the spirit of power, love and self-discipline.

Fire is such a great metaphor for faith. I love to camp and anyone who has ever had the pleasure of building a fire knows that you can't just start it and then walk away from it. Keeping a fire alive, rekindling a fire like we are called to rekindle a spirit of joy, requires constant attention – you've got to stoke the fire, add logs, rearrange the wood. If you camp with me, sometimes you have to use more drastic measures like dumping large, large quantities of lighter fluid onto the fire.

I know of no better model of this process of rekindling the love and joy of God than to watch and to learn from children. I believe Christ instructed us to “humble ourselves like children” for a reason: Children innately possess a hunger for fun, a sense of wonder and excitement about the world and an insatiable curiosity for God.

As adults, part of our duty is to teach children and shepherd them in their lives and faiths, but that is only part of our role. As any good teacher will tell you, teaching is about learning from your students. We are called to learn from children and imitate their open hearts, their love of fun and their joyful spirits.

I was so moved by Pastor Don's recent sermon on Methodist founder John Wesley's childhood. The fact that Susannah Wesley would spend one uninterrupted hour each week with each one of her 19 children certainly shaped John and Charles Wesley's faith and affected their sense of themselves and their value for family. But – I suspect that Susannah Wesley also knew how much *she* could learn about God and his love for her in those precious hours she spent with her children.

Many of you are blessed with the gift of children and grandchildren. Watch them – learn from them. Those of us who do not have children are not left out. We have many children in this church who can teach us joy. Here at Fair Oaks, we have a Sunday School, a preschool, and families who open their arms to all of us, allowing us to truly act as a village, supporting one another in love and faith.

“Faithful” by Cynthia Wold

Of the four themes for today's worship, I must confess that faithful is a challenging concept for me. I struggle with the issue of faith and faithfulness on a regular basis. So, as I prepared for today's sermon, I turned to resources to help me explore faithfulness. My first stop was Webster's New World Dictionary, which defines faithful as 1. believing firmly in something or somebody, especially a religion 2. consistently trustworthy and loyal, especially to a person, or a promise, or duty 3. accurate and true 4. displaying or resulting from a sense of responsibility or devotion to duty. As I read these, I realized that I had no qualms about the meaning of the word faithful. As a matter of fact, being trustworthy, loyal and accurate are all traits that I try to demonstrate in my life. So if it's not the meaning of the word faithful then what's my sticking point?

According to the New Oxford Annotated Bible, the book of Hebrews is an anonymous treatise. It is addressed to a group of people who had been subjected to persecution, imprisonment, and loss of property as a result of their faith. The author was worried that the people had become

worn down and that their faith was weakening. He didn't want them to turn away from their faith and abandon salvation. The first line of the scripture that Mary read says: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

The passage says to us that faithfulness hinges upon what we value as important combined with commitment. As I read through the book of Hebrews and kept pondering my discomfort, it finally hit me. I didn't have confidence in my own faithfulness. I have faith that when I go to the grocery store that my food will be safe to eat. At work, I have faith that the health care providers around me are practicing safe, sound medicine. These are things that are based in scientific principles and man made actions. My first reference source for today was a dictionary! I have the assurance of things hoped for, but my conviction in things not seen might be a little shaky. The author of Hebrews is talking to me. Because of my own human fragilities, I fear that God might not be with me. As I read the Bible or better yet look at life, I need to examine God's role instead of focusing on man's role. Faithfulness is as much about God's constant faithfulness to us as it is our faithfulness to God. Holding true to the course God has laid before us can be difficult amid this world's many alluring distractions clamoring for our time and attention. This world is attractive to human nature and bids us to expend our energies in self-satisfaction. I was thumbing through a catalog and came across a wall hanging that said, "Before you go to bed, give your troubles to God. He will be up all night anyway." I have a difficult time relying on God and to taking a leap of faith.

But luckily, I have this church community to bolster my faithfulness. I know so many faithful people. They're all around me. There are people in this church praying for others in times of turmoil and difficulty. There are church members who share their talents, their time and their money so that God can continue to work through this congregation. Our pastor and all Methodist pastors who have faith that their assignments are made by God's guiding hand. So thanks to this church, I'm learning that faithfulness is where I please God, admit my dependence upon Him, and continually seek to rely upon Him and His grace. I will try to more consistently take leaps of faith, have conviction in what can't be seen and have a good night's rest because of my faithfulness in God's work. Amen.

"Healthy" by Holly Klamann

We probably all have a good idea of what it means to be a healthy person. Even though we may not live healthy lifestyles, we all know what we should do to be healthier human beings: eat fruits and vegetables, exercise regularly, keep our minds active, stay away from drugs and alcohol, etc. But what does it mean to be a healthy congregation?

If you think about it, we can apply the same things to our spiritual selves as we do for our physical selves. In order to be faithful Christians and therefore a faithful church community, we must be sure to consume healthy spiritual food: worship, fellowship, prayer, meditation... all those things that help us sustain our relationships with God and one another. When asked, Jesus said that the greatest commandment, our highest calling, is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." We must also be sure to exercise our spiritual muscles, doing the hard work of mercy, justice, service, love, and forgiveness. Micah 6:8 says, "What does the Lord require of us but to do justice, and to love

kindness, and to walk humbly with our God?” And the second part of the greatest commandment shared earlier is, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Our faith is nothing if we don’t live it out. God gave us minds capable of complex thought. We must continue in debate, sharing conversation with those we do not understand so that we may come to understand one another, or agree to disagree.

And we must not succumb to the things that poison our souls: hatred, violence, jealousy, greed...those things that only serve to separate us from God and one another. This is not to say that we should keep ourselves in our Christian bubbles, only listening to our Christian radio and reading our Christian books. We live in *this* world, and we can’t pretend that these things do not exist. We must acknowledge the things that tear relationships and souls apart, and we must choose to not let those things take over our own lives.

One thing that came up in conversation around the table as we planned this worship service was how do we continue to live out this theme of being a faithful, sustainable, healthy and joyful congregation in the midst of the impending departure of a beloved leader?

In August of 2005 the New York Times published an article that discussed a study about the renewing of the cells in our bodies. It stated, “Although people may think of their body as a fairly permanent structure, most of it is in a state of constant flux as some cells are removed and new ones generated in their place.” Our bodies are constantly working at renewal. We get a cut, and our bodies know how to heal the wound. As a healthy congregation we must follow this example. Although our pastor’s departure may seem as significant as an amputation now, we must trust that our church body will work to heal itself to become a healthier and stronger congregation. It is up to *this* body to decide if it is up for that challenge. Amen.

“Sustainable” by Kathy Glass

Sustainability has become a buzz word in the media. Almost everywhere we hear that we are supposed to “live locally and think globally.” We should recycle, find new uses for old things, conserve. We are supposed to be taking care of the planet, so we can leave a legacy for our children, grandchildren and the generations we will never see.

In the sermon on Sustainability and in the letter sent to us during her leave, Kelly encouraged us to consider how we can find ways to sustain our walk with God and our lives in general. On our banner and in conversations with one another, we have shared ways that we are exploring the possibilities. We have made commitments to pray for one another and have found volunteer work we can do in the community. We have planted gardens. We have shared in group discussions to help glean new meaning from old lessons, and we are participating in classes to find new tools to grow in our faith. We also have a tangible example right under our feet. Fair Oaks United Methodist Church has been here, in this spot, for over 50 years.

John Wesley, the founder of our Methodist denomination, gave us 3 rules as a foundation to build on. The third melts down to “Stay in love with God.” That means our relationship with God is not just a summer fling. Not just for Sundays. Not just for our hour of need, either. We are supposed to be in it, working at it, every day, all the time. We are supposed to be growing our faith over the long haul. And why not? We know the Almighty is in it for eternity.

In the lessons and parables of Jesus, he often uses illustrations of planting and harvest, of working in a vineyard. These illustrations of a sustainable service to God work partly because the Church can be seen as a living organism, like a vine. Our congregation is a living, growing unit.

But sustainable isn't static. Growth and longevity mean change. Visitors become members. Babies are born, baptized and go on to Sunday School. People can move away; some members of our congregation have gone home to God. Over the many years that this church has been here, a number of pastors have joined the congregation and lead us in our work in the vineyards of the Lord.

We are learning to have faith. With sustained practice, it will grow. Together, we can hold onto the faith that our Gracious Giving Creator will always guide us to where we are supposed to be, even if we may not understand where that is. We can take that growing faith with us wherever we go, whatever we do. And we can pass it on to our children, our grandchildren and the generations we will never see.