

“Life Delights in Life”

Sermon from 1 Chronicles 16:27-34

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for the First Baptist Church of McMinnville

Reverend Erika Marksbury, Senior Pastor

*In God's presence are splendor and majesty;
In God's sanctuary, power and beauty and joy.
Pay honor to God, you tribes of people!
Pay tribute to the God of glory and power!
Pay honor to the glorious name of God;
bring out the offering, and carry it into God's courts.
Worship God in the splendor of holiness!
Tremble in God's presence, all the earth!*

*The world stands firm and unshakable: let the heavens be glad,
let the earth rejoice, say among the nations, “God reigns!”
Let the sea roar and all that it holds!
Let the fields exult and all that is in them!
Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy at the presence of God,
for God is coming, coming to reign on earth!*

Give thanks for God's goodness; God's love endures forever!

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Noriki Meek is 72 years old. Her daughter remembers the day that they were debating which grocery store to go to - the one on the north side of town was having a great sale, but the one closer by had a better produce section - when suddenly her mom, apropos of nothing, asks her, “Can you tell that I’m glowing?”

Her daughter remembers being caught off guard, saying, “Um, yeah, I guess you look nice,” and steering the conversation back to their shopping destination.

But not too long after that, the daughter is interviewing the mother – the daughter is a producer for the radio show *This American Life* – and she returns to her mother’s question. She says, “Why did you ask me that?”

And her mother says, “To me, it was so obvious. I knew that I was radiating joy, just delight, I think I was glowing inside; I thought you must be able to see it.”

They’re on a road trip at this point – through Texas and New Mexico – the mother has enlisted her daughter to drive, while she spends her time seeing sand dunes, spotting rainbows, taking multiple baths in the hotel rooms when she wants to. It hasn’t always been like this. Her daughter remembers that during her growing-up years, her mom was practical, was frugal, didn’t hug or kiss much. She was a full-time mom to her six children, and once they were grown and out of the house, her husband fell ill, and her caretaking transferred to him.

And here, driving this long stretch, her daughter says, “I don’t think I’ve heard you use the word ‘delight’ ever.” And her mom says, “I don’t think I would have until... well, until now.”

Her daughter is a little hurt. Says, “Ever felt this way before? When we were kids?”

And her mom says, “No.” Doesn’t miss a beat. “No. I don’t think I felt delighted. I was glad you were born, and safe, but raising you and your brothers, taking care of your dad, all of that was heavy.”

So the daughter asks her mom what delights her now, and the mom tells her daughter that every morning when she wakes up, she goes to the bathroom, and she’s got a specially made Japanese toilet, and when sits down on it, the toilet seat is warm. “Every morning,” she tells her daughter. “Consistent delight.”

She loves that she can get day-old pastries for a dollar. She stocks up, freezes them, and they’re good for a long time. She takes herself to the movies - sometimes three shows in a week - early in the day. Sometimes she has the whole theatre to herself. She’s taking a ballet class for seniors. She reads biographies in bed, a few hours every night.

All of this is new. The daughter confides in the listener that when her dad died four years ago, her mom fell apart. She’d spent decades caring for him, and in those last years, would often drive him to the ER in the middle of the night, would check his oxygen levels while he slept. She grieved intensely. The mom remembers, “I really took a small step forward each morning after he died, just to make sure I was alive. So each morning I got up and I had this terrible pain in my chest, and I just said, ‘Ok, I think I can make myself live to the end of this

day.” After six months, she moved in with her daughter. Every night, they got into their pajamas at 10 o’clock and read in bed together.

This nearness to death has made her think more about how she spends her days now. She says, “Maybe because my life is getting shorter, that pushes me to be more courageous. On my calendar, there are things I want to do. This is the life I have, and I want it to be delightful.”

At the end, she voices some nervousness to her daughter about the interview airing. She’s worried people will think she’s annoying, going on like this about delight - like it’s one of that words that starts to sound funny if you say it too often. She’s pretty sure people will think she’s self-absorbed. But larger than her concern for that is her desire to let other people know that this kind of lightness is possible, especially after, so many years that have been so heavy.

And I think, listening closely to her, we don’t actually hear someone who’s self-absorbed. We hear someone who is experiencing tiny joys outside of herself, and taking, or finally having, the time and space to let those things matter.

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I think about how she asks her daughter for affirmation, though - “Can you tell that I’m glowing?” - and her daughter doesn’t know how to respond. She says yes, stammering, and

in a way that tones down her mother's original question. "Can you tell that I'm glowing? Um, yeah, I guess you like nice."

Do we not know what to do with each other's delight?

In this scripture - this recording of an ancient worship celebration, where different Psalms are woven together - we hear how the creation celebrates and responds to the Creator. *Let the heavens be glad. Let the earth rejoice.* And then this relational part: *Let the sea roar and all that it holds! Let the fields exult and all that is in them! Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy at the presence of God.* Do you hear that - both the parts, and the whole?

Let the sea roar - and all the fish, and all the turtles, and all the sharks, and all the whales, and all the coral, and all the squid, and every tiny creature and every massive wave - let the roaring come from each one and from all.

Let the fields exult - and every bunny, and every bobcat, and every goat, and every flower - let the celebrating be from each living thing and from all.

Let the forest sing - and every tree, and every bird, and every snake, and every mushroom - let the song rise from every corner and from the whole of it. It's as if the cry comes up from one, and the others take it up, too - they echo it back and forth, until every living thing is part of this chorus - and if every living thing is, then the entire living thing is - each tree,

and the forest; each fish, and the sea; each flower, and the field; each part, and the whole.

Forest ecologist Suzanne Simard says forests are wired for this, for sharing, for communicating, for wisdom. She says for a long time, scientists were working under the assumption that forests are grounds of competition, that different kinds of trees were working against each other, would do what they needed to to survive and would endanger each other. But more recently, they've been able to do this kind of underground mapping, and found that actually, every tree is linked to every other tree. (This is old knowledge for aboriginal scientists, but new to Simard and her colleagues.) And they all rely on the oldest trees in the forest, to pass on wisdom, to share warning signals, to share what they know, even to pass on nutrients under the soil.

And this sharing, Simard says, it's good for reproduction, and that's sometimes where the science has stopped. But she's discovered it also creates meaningful cooperation, and collaboration - meaning the trees don't just help each other survive, they help each other thrive. Our deepest questions are not just about survival. What we want - what we are created for - is thriving.

Simard says, "Forests are really dynamic places, just like our own societies. And it does involve death, it involves pulling back, it involves learning, or redirecting your resources, sometimes, to learn something new — so it's not always about

growth. It's not always about becoming bigger and better in a traditional or a visible way that we might measure as wealth, for example, or power. You know, the most powerful parts of our social systems can be the elder that has aged and is guiding younger people, or guiding their culture."

Maybe, the one to say, "*Can you see that I'm glowing?*" Maybe the one to call attention to God's presence, right there, always. The one to toss that out there, that idea of delight, and hope it lands, hope there's an echo back, and then another, and then a resounding chorus. The poet William Blake told us, "Everything that lives is holy; life delights in life." What if each day, whatever else is happening in our own lives or in the world - even as we grieve, even as we rage, even as we mourn - we also took a moment to remember that?

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You may remember Ross Gay - we read from his *Book of Delights* at the communion table two weeks ago. The book was a project he began on his birthday, the day he turned forty-two; he decided that each day of his forty-second year, he'd write a quick essay about one thing that day that brought him delight.

And after five months of this, he pens a confession: he tells the reader he's started "stacking delights." He says they've begun to accumulate. He's starting to recognize them more and more, he's trained a kind of "delight muscle" and now it's working, well, and he writes, "whereas I originally walked

through my day attending to my delights until I arrived at the one that felt irrepressible and then sat down to wonder about it with a pen in a notebook, I have since begun cataloguing delights that I will save for a future date.”

He calls this practice “stacking delights,” he says, you know, like a cook at Denny’s might stack your pancakes, and he says this is useful, but it actually defeats the purpose of the book, which is to notice the delights that come in time. The project requires of him a kind of temporal allegiance, he writes, a kind of daily attentiveness. It won’t do to jot down lots of notes on Monday and then try to write about one of them on Thursday, another on Friday.

He spends the rest of this essay using up what he’s stored, letting it all go, because what he’s really after, he writes, is “a practice of witnessing one’s delight, daily, which actually requires vigilance. It also requires faith that delight will be with you, daily, that you needn’t hoard it. No scarcity of delight.”

And isn’t he right? How could it be otherwise, if we live in this world, if the trees and forests, the waves and the fish and the seas, all sing out, and we get to hear it, all exult, and we get to see it, how could it be other than an abundance of delight?