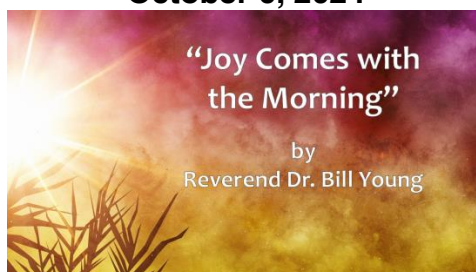


## JOY COMES WITH THE MORNING

Luke 7:31-35

Psalm 30

October 6, 2024



Hanging from the side of a cliff is not pleasant! Indeed, even if you think you're prepared, it is traumatic!



I had my first cliff hanging experience when I was ten years old in the hilly city of Duluth, Minnesota where I was born and spent my first ten years. A friend, David, and I were climbing the bluffs near our neighborhood one afternoon. We got into an argument, over what I can no longer remember, and I decided to head home the short way, down the steep face of one of the cliffs. I came to a ledge and decided to hang off it and drop down to the ledge below. It did not seem very far. But when I let myself down, I suddenly realized that the ledge was farther down than it had appeared. So there I was, suspended on the side of a cliff, unable to climb back up and afraid to let go. I remember crying out, "God, please help me! Please, help me!"

My experience on that bluff in Duluth, Minnesota was one of the more dramatic cliff hanging experiences in my life, but it certainly was not the last. There have been other times in my life, as I am sure there have been times in yours, when I felt trapped, and I cried out to the Lord.

We had just moved to Oregon. My wife, Sue, was pregnant with our first child. We were alone, far from family and friends. Only a few days after we arrived, Sue began to experience labor pains. I called her doctor, whom we had not yet met, and he seemed perturbed when I told him we thought she was going into labor, although her due date was not for another two months. But when he asked me how close and severe her contractions were,

and I told him, he shouted, "Get her to the hospital, now!" At the hospital a nurse quickly examined Sue, and exclaimed, "Oh no, the baby is tiny and it's a breach," and then rushed out of the room. There we were, all alone in an austere hospital examining room, terrified at what might be going wrong, and I cried out silently, "Why, God, why? Please help us, now!"



The Lord did hear my cry. Despite being very tiny, like the wee one on the screen, and weighing just four pounds at birth, and despite having to stay in the hospital for a couple of weeks, our daughter Rachel was soon thriving. The burst of enthusiasm with which she entered the world has not let up, and she is full of a wonderful zest for life.



She now has two children of her own, and teaches in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Iowa. If I may speak for a moment with parental pride Rachel has won national awards for her teaching and research.



Every once in a while, when I look at Rachel, and her brother Matthew, who was also a premature baby, tears well up in my eyes and I pray silently, "Thank you, Lord, for your mercy."

At times of anguish in my life, I have often turned to the 5th verse of the 30th Psalm,

which we read as our Old Testament lesson this morning:

(God's) anger is but for a moment;

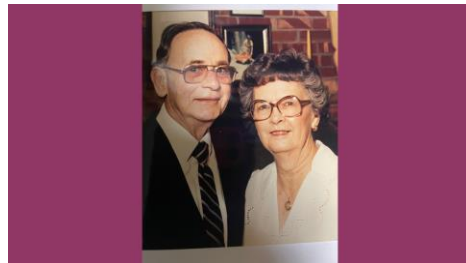
(God's) favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night,

but joy comes with the morning.

Joy comes with the morning. In that simple expression is captured the heart of biblical faith. Yes, there is darkness and despair in life. Yes, we will at times feel abandoned by God, and at those times we will, if we allow ourselves to feel the pain, cry out to God in anguish, as Jesus did. But, as the Gospel of John so beautifully says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (1:5). Yes, weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

This verse and all of Psalm 30 took on special meaning for me very early one winter morning when I was in graduate school at the University of Iowa (yes, the same University where my daughter now teaches). Sue and I had been called to my parents' home in Ponca City, Oklahoma, because my father, Art,



pictured here with my mother, Rhoda, was gravely ill. His physicians were afraid he would not recover. If you want to see your father alive, you had better come now, one doctor told me. For several days after we arrived, Dad's condition worsened. He began to slip in and out of consciousness. I remember feeling very angry with God for allowing such a wonderful father to be taken from his family and a loving and caring pastor from his congregation. My brother Bob and I took up a vigil beside his bed; we wanted to be certain one of us would be there with Dad should he die.



At the same time, members of our church, the First Presbyterian Church of Ponca City, the church where I was nurtured in the faith and helped to discern my own call to ministry, showed us the beauty of Christian fellowship and the power of prayer. They organized an around-the-clock prayer vigil. Night and day a member of the congregation would be in the chapel of our church praying for Dad's recovery, while we sat at his bedside. Early one morning I came to the hospital to relieve my brother, who had been there most of the night. I sat down beside my dad and picked up a Bible. I felt moved to turn to the Book of Psalms and begin to read from some of the psalms aloud, although I did not know if Dad could hear me.

Weeping may tarry for the night,  
but joy comes with the morning.  
*Psalm 30:5*

As I read from the 30th psalm, I took my father's hand, and when I came to the verse I have shared with you

Weeping may tarry for the night,  
but joy comes with the morning,

he squeezed my hand. Tears of joy came to my eyes, and I knew at that moment Dad was going to make it. Indeed, that very day he began to regain full consciousness, and in a few weeks he had recovered from the illness his physicians thought might very well take him from us.

Psalm 30 speaks to all the seasons of life.



The speaker was leading a successful, prosperous life. He probably thought to himself, "This is living! it doesn't get any better than this. I've got it made!" But just when his life seemed to be ideal, things fell apart. His world came crashing down around him.



The psalmist does not tell us how it happened. it may very well have been a life-threatening illness like Covid has been.

You have turned my mourning  
into dancing; you have taken off  
my sackcloth and clothed me  
with joy.

*Psalm 30:11*

From the depths of his being, he cried out to the Lord for deliverance. In another vivid verse, the speaker expresses the joy he felt when the crisis suddenly ended, probably when his health was restored (30:11):

You have turned my mourning into dancing;  
you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.

The dance metaphor in this verse describes a spontaneous response to an act of deliverance by God.

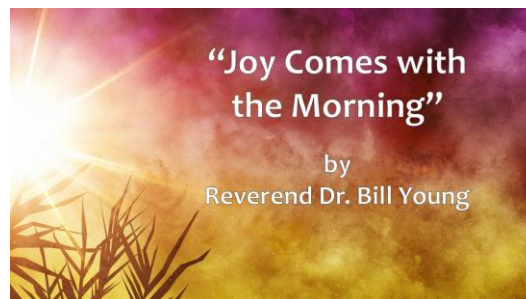


When the people of Israel escaped from the Egyptians and attributed their freedom to the intervention of God, the Book of Exodus tells us that Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, and all the women, danced and sang unto the Lord (Exodus 15:20-21).



When the ark of the covenant, which contained the commandments given to Moses by God on Mount Sinai, was brought for the first time to Jerusalem, Scripture tells us that King David danced for joy (2 Samuel 6: 5).

The Hebrew word translated “dancing” in Psalm 30 literally means "whirling" or "writhing." The dance the Psalmist is describing was not a stately waltz, but an impassioned jump for joy, like the child who has just been told her parents have decided to go to Disney World instead of Des Moines for vacation. The point, of course, is not literally dancing. Even those of us with two left feet can let ourselves feel and express the joy that bursts upon us when we move from a season of despair and anguish in our lives into a time of renewal and rejuvenation.



For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven, the old

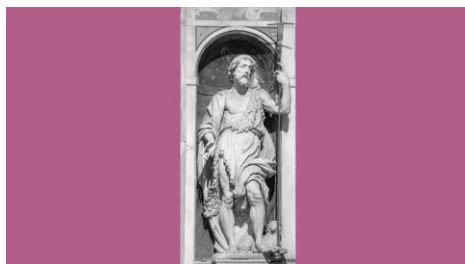
teacher known in the Bible as Ecclesiastes tells us (Ecclesiastes 3:1). The times we cannot control; the seasons of our life unfold often in ways we cannot predetermine. No matter whether we approve or not, the dance goes on. We may want it to be different, but we do not get to play the tune.

According to a tradition preserved in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus compared the people of his day to children who were angry because they could not dictate the game or the dance that was being played (Matthew 11:16-17; Luke 7:31-35). Of course, that is the way children are. They want to control the games they play, and when things do not go their way, they usually let it be known.



Around our house the complaints from my two children were often about computer games. At least once a day, one of them, would shout at the computer, "You can't do that; it's cheating!" The child in all of us wants to wave a wand and have everything go our way, and when life does not conform to our desires, we act like the children Jesus described; we sit on the sidelines and pout.

Jesus sensed he did not have much time to proclaim the message his heavenly father had given to him. His call was urgent. Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:14-15). There is no time to sit out the dance, carping because it's not the tune you would prefer. It is time to respond to God's invitation, time to join the dance.

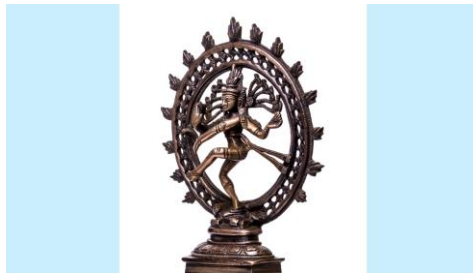


People rejected John the Baptist, Jesus said, because his way was too austere; now they were turning away from Jesus because he was too joyful and free.



He consorted with tax collectors and other known sinners. He even ate and drank with them and attended their parties. The kingdom, Jesus was saying, has been presented to you in contrasting styles and you have rejected both. How much time do we spend, we should be asking ourselves, in our families, at work, or at church, complaining that they are not playing our tune, instead of joining in the dance. It's always easier to sit on the sidelines and criticize. But just as was the case for the people whom Jesus was confronting, we sit out the dance at our peril and certainly to the detriment of the work of the Kingdom to which Christ calls us.

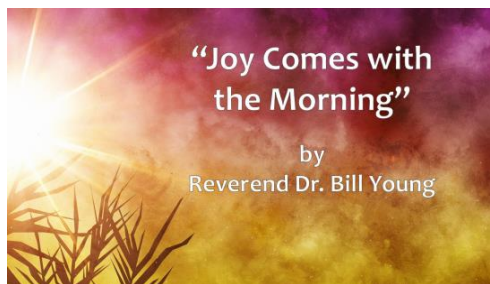
The dance goes on. The Lord's dance goes on, as we move through the passing seasons of our lives, as we move ever closer to the culmination of God's creation and the ultimate coming to earth of God's kingdom.



Other religions speak of God's dance by which the universe moves, like Nataraja, the Hindu Lord of the Dance. However, in the Christian understanding, the dance of God is not merely a heavenly dance, which keeps the universe moving. As the song, Lord of the Dance, puts it:

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,  
                   and i danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,  
 And I came down from heaven and I danced on earth.  
                   At Bethlehem I had my birth.





Today, on this World Communion Sunday, we celebrate with all our sisters and brothers in Christ the dance of the Lord's coming to earth. The dance began with the angel's song of peace on earth, good will to all mankind. However, the dance of our Lord also involved suffering and death; he knows how we feel when we pass through times of anguish and abandonment. But the dance went on. It became an ecstatic dance of joy, as we celebrate each Sunday the resurrection of Jesus and our renewal to new life. The dance of the Lord is a dance that still goes on. The challenge before all of us who claim Christ as Lord, in the words of the song, is this:

Dance, then wherever you may be;  
     I am the Lord of the Dance said he,  
 and the promise  
     I'll lead you all wherever you may be,  
     And I'll lead you all in the dance said he.



Remember the ledge on which I left myself hanging at the beginning of this sermon. I still find myself clinging to it, and as I did when I was ten years old, letting go because I don't have the strength to hold on any longer. The one to whom I cried out in that time of anguish took hold of me when I was forced to admit I could not save myself. In my fall from that ledge I suffered a sprained wrist, a mild concussion, and a badly bruised ego. However, it wasn't enough to teach me to stop hanging from ledges on occasion. And when I find myself in cliff hanging situations, I still feel a sense of security slipping away and I cry out to God. And when I let go, I find the Lord is there, as I believe God is always there throughout our lives here on this

earth and beyond. That is the faith we celebrate on this World Communion Sunday with our sisters and brothers in Christ throughout the world.



I would like to close this morning with a few stanzas from a poem written by my mother Rhoda Magers Young. She was a gifted musician and poet, and wrote this poem, entitled "Life is a Dance," in response to my dad's illness and recovery.

Life is a happy, joyful dance  
Filled with excitement and  
romance,  
Swirling with pleasures everyday,  
Twirling with movement, bright  
and gay,

Life is a happy, joyful dance  
Filled with excitement and romance,  
Swirling with pleasures every day,  
Twirling with movement, bright and gay,

LIFE IS A DANCE,  
A FAST-MOVING DANCE.

LIFE IS A DANCE, A FAST-MOVING DANCE.

Then suddenly, how,  
we do not know  
Life can become adagio,  
Now it is bitter, gone the sweet,  
A tempo that drags our weary  
feet.

Then suddenly, how, we do not know  
 Life can become adagio,  
 Now it is bitter, gone the sweet,  
 A tempo that drags our weary feet.

**LIFE IS A DANCE,  
 A SLOW-MOVING DANCE.**

LIFE IS A DANCE, A SLOW-MOVING DANCE.

**The dancer must change with  
 the lively pace  
 And find in largo the saving grace,  
 Listen and hear life's pulsing beat,  
 Then it will guide your dancing  
 feet,**

The dancer must change with the lively pace  
 And find in largo the saving grace,  
 Listen and hear life's pulsing beat,  
 Then it will guide your dancing feet,

**HARK TO THE DANCE,  
 THIS FAST-CHANGING DANCE!**

HARK TO THE DANCE, THIS FAST-CHANGING DANCE!

Amen and Amen!