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*"God Gives Us Joy"*

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Sermon Text: Hebrews 10:19-25 / John 15: 13-15  
Mariner Sands Chapel

Dr. Gary Carr  
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This is our first worship service that we call "Friendship Day." We desired to create a morning that was both informative and uplifting to your spirit. We pray that God's joy may be made plain to you. We pray God's joy would be available to you every day. Joy is not happiness because it is an enduring quality. It does not depend on what is happening at the moment. The very word, "happiness" has its roots in what is temporary. Joy is a state of being, a place of serene contentment. It is a quality that is meant to last. Joy is what the Apostle Paul described in his letter to the Philippians while he was in prison. He wrote, "the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts." Joy and serenity were one of the favorite attributes of God. God thrills us with joy because God can be trusted to keep his promises. God's clearest example of joy is the treasure of all creation. What we notice around us declares God's elation with us. The flora and the fauna are the little surprises of joy God provides. God captures our attention with each sunrise, each bloom of a flower, each chorus of the birds. God created all this for you to enjoy.

Our selection of Bible readings today is taken from Hebrews and of John. In the book of John, we hear Jesus casting an example of what extreme love looks like. He says to his disciples, I am now calling you my "friends." And real friends should know what each other are doing. In other words, those who are friends of God are willing to do what God asks. God make his agenda known to His friends. Jesus wants to make everything known about God clear to those who are seeking him. We believe Jesus can do this. Hebrews indicates that Jesus is a priest that is superior to any priests who came before or after him. Jesus is superior to angels (Heb.1:4) superior to Moses (Heb. 3:3 ) superior to the sacrifices of the Old Testament (Heb. 9:14). The offering Jesus provided on the Cross is exclusive. Christ dying for human sin was a once-and-for-all kind of offering. On a hill faraway, long ago, the emblem of suffering and shame has become a wondrous attraction for millions. Hebrews tells us to encourage perseverance in the face of suffering. Historically, those who were in Rome in 60 A.D. endured much hardship, shame and reproach. Greco-Roman society was wary of believers who would not worship any other gods. Christianity was suspect by the Jewish culture in Rome, causing further separation and eventually persecution of believers.

God has done so much for us to provide a way for us to be His friend. How can we respond to a friendly God? What we find in the passage from Hebrews are some simple action steps: Let us think of ways to use our joy to stimulate others to love and good works. Let us hold on tight to the faith we have. And let us encourage one another weekly as a community of joy. When Mariner Sands residents maintain friendships by finding ways to love others, God gives others joy through us. When we help them hold on tight to faith when life gets tough, God holds on tight as well. And when we meeting regularly to worship God, giving and receiving encouragement, then God's magnificent plan for our joy is complete.

Finally, let us be authentic with ourselves and consider this question: am I a friend of God? Jesus said Greater love has no one that this: to lay one's life for one's friends. Jesus did that for you and me. He wants to be your friend. He wants your joy to be made full. He offers you to share in His glory forever. People asked Jesus (John 6:28,29) "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

Jesus replied, " The work of God is this; to believe in the one he has sent. No Jesus, no joy. Know Jesus, know joy.