

The Message for April 15, 2012

John 15:5-11

Up... With God

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Here are ten statements that we will probably never hear anyone say in church.

1. *Hey! It's my turn to sit in the front row!*
2. *I was so inspired I never noticed the sermon went 25 minutes over time!*
3. *Personally, I find sharing Jesus with the unchurched more enjoyable than playing golf!*
4. *I've decided to give our church the \$500 a month I used to send to the TV evangelists!*
5. *I loved worship so much today that for the next 6 months I'm going to bring someone new with me every week.*
6. *Forget Robert's Rules of Order what does God want us to do?*
7. *I love it when we sing songs (hymns) in worship that we've never sung before!*
8. *Nothing inspires me more than our annual stewardship pledge drive!*
9. *Pastor, we want to send you in January to a Continuing Education event in the Bahamas's! And take your family with you.*
10. *Since we're ALL here, let's start worship early.*

These are not normal statements someone would say in church. But wow! What if they were? Consider this list of ten funny statements. These are bulletin bloopers that have appeared in various church bulletins over the years. Bloopers are normal. We have bloopers in our bulletin from time to time but nothing like these. Thank God!

1. *Don't let worry kill you – let the church help.*
2. *This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs. Lewis to come forward and LAY an egg on the altar.*
3. *Saturday at 4:00 p.m. there will be an ice cream social. All ladies GIVING milk will please come early.*
4. *The sermon this morning is: "Jesus Walks on the Water." The sermon next week is: "Searching for Jesus"*
5. *Thursday night--Potluck supper. Prayer and MEDICATION to follow.*
6. *At tonight's Sunday Evening worship, the sermon topic will be "What is Hell?" Come early and listen to our choir practice.*
7. *Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don't forget to bring your husbands.*
8. *For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.*
9. *Remember in prayer the many people who are sick OF our church and community.*
10. *Bertha Belch, a missionary from Africa will be speaking in the fellowship hall tonight at 7:00 p. m. Come and hear Bertha Belch all the way from Africa.*

These are funny statements. They make us laugh. And it's good to laugh. We could probably use a little more laughter in our lives. Research shows that laughter stimulates our immune system, increases blood flow, and is a natural stress reliever.

People who laugh are healthier and tend to live longer. Laughter is good medicine. So why not laugh more. A child laughs on the average 400 times a day. Adults laugh on the average only 15 times a day. Laughter is not normal for us adults. I wonder why that is -- especially since laughter makes us feel better and it's so good for us!

A Jewish proverb says, "What soap is to the body, laughter is to the soul."

Mark Twain said, "Laughter is the greatest weapon that we humans possess and it's the one we use the least!"

Abraham Lincoln said, "If I do not laugh, I should die!"

Unknown Author said, "Love makes the world go 'round, and laughter keeps us from getting dizzy."

Laughter helps make life worth living because laughter brings a certain **joy** to life. Jesus said in our reading for today, "*Abide in me (in other words stay connected to me) so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*"

Joy is not the same as happiness. We tend to use joy and happiness interchangeable. They are not the same. The word "joy" or "rejoicing" appears 330 times in the Bible. The word "happy" or "happiness" appears only 26 times. That should tell us something.

Here is the difference. Happiness is the evidence of presents in your life – gifts/stuff. Joy is the evidence of God's presence in your life – grace/Holy Spirit. Happiness is what happens to us. Joy is what happens within us. Jesus offers joy not happiness.

2000 years ago, Jesus appeared on this planet and brought an amazing change to the quality of life. Jesus was not normal. He was unique, different, fascinating, amazing, appealing, special... That's because Jesus had a secret for life. A secret he offers to anyone and everyone who commits their lives to him. This secret is why so many people are drawn to him.

Jesus' secret was and is this -- **an inner joy!** A joy that results from being lifted up to live with God every minute of every day. Jesus' joy was the result of his connection with God. Do you live everyday connected to Jesus?

Jesus uses the image of a vine and branches to describe our relationship with him. He is the vine and we are the branches. There is one vine – Jesus. There are two kinds of branches – those that produce and those that do not. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself. That's normal. A branch by itself is dead. So without Jesus we are dead. With Jesus we are alive and producing fruit – good fruit. That's normal for those who are connected to Jesus.

I gave some thought about this vine and branch metaphor. And here are three things that are implied in this metaphor.

1. Love is the sap. Love runs through every part of the plant – vine, braches, leaves, fruit... Love is our life blood in the church. When love stops - life stops.

I was on my way this week to a business where they obviously hate me. The way they look at me and treat me when I walk into that business. I can feel the hate towards me. As I was driving along Route 422 I was thinking about how people in this church hate me and hate the leadership I've brought to this congregation. Driving along I was wondering why so many people hate me. Then it dawned on me. The entire world could hate me but God loves me. And that brought a certain joy to my heart. If you find yourself in a relationship where people hate you, know this, God loves you. We are to love one another in this place because love is the sap.

2. Identity and purpose. We are branches. Producing fruit comes naturally to those who are committed to Jesus. Branches do not compete with one another, or blame one another, or speak ill of one another, or point fingers at who is or isn't producing fruit. Instead healthy branches support one another, encourage one another, and help one another live into their full potential in Christ.

My children started playing baseball this year. When we arrived at Thea's practice, Simon and I were off doing some drills. Thea's coach then invited Simon and me to help out. I played catcher as the coach pitched to the players. Simon helped out with base running. I would encourage the players every time they hit the ball. It just came naturally to me. "Good hit!" "Well done!" When I walked off the field many of the parents thanked me for encouraging their child to learn how to play the game. That's what we are to do in the church – encourage one another and support one another in learning how to live the faith as disciples of Jesus.

3. Healthy branches never stop growing or producing good fruit no matter how old they are. People will know that we are disciples by the fruit we produce. A branch on the Jesus vine can only produce sweet fruit and never bitter fruit.

What kind of fruit are you producing? You may not know but others certainly do. Ask them. Put aside our pride and egos to grow in producing sweet fruit.

It's easy to produce bitter fruit when we are not connected to Jesus. So that raises the question - how do we stay connected to Jesus? By using the acronym S-T-A-Y.

S is for Scripture. Jesus said that as the Word remains in us, we remain connected to him. Spending time reading and studying Scripture is critical to this connection. Each branch in the church – each individual – practices this discipline regularly because we want to not because we have to. We may not be reading the exact same passage, or drawing the same conclusions, or applying the words to our lives the same way -- but by reading the Bible the Holy Spirit is at work in each one of us. S is for Scripture.

T is for time. Time spent with other believers. We stay connected with God by forming relationships with others who are growing in the faith too. LIFE Groups and ministry teams provide the means for us to be working together to discern how to apply the faith to our daily lives. We may not always agree so we learn how to learn from one another. When we get together in LIFE Groups and ministry teams we can feel the Holy Spirit at work in our midst. T is for time.

A is for attitude. An attitude of mystery, humility, and compassion in our daily lives. We realize that we are connected to something so grand, so mysterious, so incredible that words can't even explain it. We simply live it. Our attitude is revealed in the fruit we produce. A is for attitude.

Y is for you. You make the choice! We don't talk that way as Lutherans. But maybe we should. You make the choice of being connected to Jesus or being connected to something or someone else. It's a choice that we all make. Jesus has chosen to be connected with you. Are you committed to him?

Word of warning... Staying connected to Jesus is not normal and it's not easy either. Otherwise this place would be filled here this morning. Myerstown and the surrounding area would be a completely different place. So here is what I discovered. We need to laugh at ourselves from time to time and work through our own personal bloopers every day.

My prayer is that each one of us will go from this worship service with the sap of God's love flowing in us and through us. That we will live into our identity and purpose as branches on the Jesus' vine. And that we will never, ever stop living with the joy of believing in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Amen.