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on the lookout audio.mp3

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DURATION

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2 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Speaker1

Good morning. Good morning, everybody. Boy, I am aware this morning that due to a bunch of different things that all kind of happened at once, it has been a long time since I have been up here preaching with our congregation. And I was noticing it this morning. I feel like I was actually a little bit like a tiger pacing in the back of the room like, OK, I get to be up here again. And to share a service with all of you, so I am really glad to be here this week as we are as Jessica said, believe it or not. Less than a week from Christmas as we close out our holiday message series inspired by the song that you just heard from our band, our message series this joy. Now, all through this season, we have been asking all of our preachers in different ways, asking how can we connect to joy? Especially in this life in this year. The second year that people have been selling novelty Christmas ornaments with dumpsters on fire, right, we are really in a joy deficit. How even if our circumstances are hard, can we find a joy that we can rely on? For strength. That we need now to face this world as it is. And those are big questions. But I want to start today with a small answer.

[00:01:37] Speaker1

With a very small thing. That, despite his size, is really reliably one of the things that has been bringing me joy this season. He's a little pug named Noodle. Yeah, that's Noodle now I I have never met Noodle, and I'm guessing none of you have ever met Noodle either, but some of you know him, how many of you know who this dog is? Oh my gosh, only one hand. Oh, I'm so happy that I get to introduce you. Noodle has become something of an internet celebrity these past few months after his human roommate, a man named John Graziano, started posting short videos of their morning routine him and noodle on Tik Tok. You see, Noodle is a senior dog. Noodle has arthritis. Noodle is 13 years old. And as John puts it, some days Noodle wakes up and he just doesn't really have any bones like the internal skeleton is just not they're not working that day. So John's morning routine is to wake noodle up very slowly, get them all snugly and warm, give them a little doggy massage and then ever so slowly and carefully lift noodle up onto his four paws to see if he has bones that day. I'm going to ask Ted in our tech booth to play you an example of what this looks like.

[00:03:13] Speaker2

Good morning, everyone, and welcome back to yet another round of no bones, the game where we find out if my 13 year old pug woke up with bones and as a result we find out what kind of day we're going to have. Now I've got to be honest with you, it is raining this morning. Noodle does not do the rain and I I just. We'll see if he does bounce. No, Noodle. Oh, it gets me every time. Ok, so it's a no bones morning, no bones morning. I don't think that's bad news. I think it's just something to keep in mind, like if today. Ok, so yes, we try it again. And sure enough, no bones. So like if today was the day you were planning to call your sister and tell her you just hate her husband, like today is not the day to do that. Just don't do that.

[00:03:56] Speaker1

So once John started posting these videos on Tik Tok, noodles started to amass this huge, huge following like an oracle of some kind for our times, right? People started tuning in every single morning to find out what kind of day it was going to be. It's going to be a no bones day where we all take it easy on ourselves, where we're extra kind to one another. Leave the hard stuff like talking to your sister about her husband for tomorrow. Or was it going to be a bones. day like this?

[00:04:30] Speaker2

Good morning, everyone, and welcome back to yet another round of no bones, the game where we find out if my 13 year old pug woke up with bones and subsequently we find out what kind of day we're going to have because his body has sort of become this conduit of our good fortune. Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh, there are bones. There are bones today. Ok, all right. You know what that means? Treat yourself today. Schmooze that judge. Buy those diamonds. Put that fried chicken on your salad. Don't buy the diamonds. You can be smarter with your money, but treat yourself today.

[00:04:58] Speaker1

So a bonus day is the time to tackle those big projects, right? Go out and get things done. Carpe diem. Now I am clearly not the only person who found some joy in checking noodles forecast. Every morning, all kinds of people started writing songs about Noodle. They started filming skits about noodle, making jokes, about calling in sick for work. Because obviously it's a no bones day, right? We can't have that meeting. I even saw a photo online from a hospital where somebody hung a huge whiteboard in the nurse's break room to update the staff each morning so that everyone could act accordingly, right? What kind of bone's day it was? So I have just found Noodle to be a great little mascot for joy. In the season, because just like sometimes we have bonus days and no bone's days, some days we are feeling the joy. Some days we are able to see it and connect to it. And some days we're just not. And that's OK. I think it really may be harder than ever, at least in my lifetime this year. Not just to have those days where there is not a close connection with joy, but it's it's hard to feel like it's far away and we don't know when it'll come back because after all that we have been through, I feel and maybe you feel. A craving for simple joy. For some uncomplicated joy to feel good in a way that doesn't have an asterisks next to it, that doesn't have to wear a mask to feel good in a way that doesn't have to worry about sanitizing anything afterwards.

[00:06:44] Speaker1

Joy, that doesn't have to worry. Joy, that does not have to worry that our connection's going to school, going to church, going to a family gathering could harm us. We wish. And we long for that kind of simple, uncomplicated joy. And we are not finding it in the old places. Many of us. But fortunately, even if we're not finding it in those old places. We can notice that Joy does spread around in little ways. That joy can be like pollen. That it flies through the air and it rests in crevices and little hitting corners. Because it wants to live. It spreads around and it finds new ground to grow in. And so even while we are waiting and also working to bring joy back to those places we love so much, we can still find joy in unexpected places and grow it from there. I'll give you an example. How to find joy in small things. It's not from my life, so I'm changing names here actually to protect their privacy. But there is a friend of mine who writes updates every now and then about her daughter on Facebook. Now, these are not big special updates of big special moments. This is just something she does from time to time to catalog what life is like right now for her little girl.

[00:08:28] Speaker1

And I want to read this one to you from a couple of weeks ago. My friend said three is such a good age. I can hardly believe it. At 37 months. We can devour mountains of picture books. With Riley exclaiming in enthusiasm, genuinely when, say, the characters decide to weave their spools of thread into a cloth, she says out loud to no one in particular. That's a great idea. Assembling a marble run is for her cause for jumping up and down glee. At 37 months, we can have conversations now. Riley gets distressed that the son is missing. She does not want winter. When she comes home from preschool, she tells me about how her friend scratched her, but then she said she was sorry and it made it better. Her toys like to ride around in a boot all together, she makes me something called candy pies. She insists on picking out her own clothes, puts them on, looks in the mirror and says they aren't cute for me enough and picks out different clothes. Riley is enthusiastic about ice cream and pasta, oranges, white yogurt, bananas and chocolate. She tends to pick a food and want tons of it for each meal, then want a completely different food for the next meal. And this is how a few days ago she had five oranges for dinner. She loves counting and numbers and the alphabet, she spontaneously burst into song all the time and sings them all the way through.

[00:10:20] Speaker1

Riley continues to insist that sharks and dinosaurs are too scary. She loves to keep her mask on her ears. And button her coat up all the way and wear gloves and hats all bundled up. She loves to go to the drugstore to buy batteries. But after two blocks, she tells me there are too many steps and she needs to be carried. She still thinks the verb for lugging a toddler in your arms is carry you as in mommy, can you carry me? I mourn my friend said each baby idiosyncrasy that her language loses. She's still self-identifies as a baby. But she knows her name is Riley to. Her skin is gold, she says. But it turns pink when it gets cold. She's particular about the numbers of buses and likes to point out the numbers on the bus stops because she knows them. Even the bus stops that are actually one our parking signs. Alas, there is still no one bus to her great disappointment, and the two bus does not seem to stop at every two hour parking sign. I don't know. My friend says. She's just pretty great. She's just pretty great. My friend clearly loves her daughter. And that is why this note full of unremarkable moments caught my eye. Because it is so unremarkable, and it doesn't even have some big moral at the end of the story.

[00:12:08] Speaker1

It's just paragraph upon paragraph of love. And noticing. An attention. And I think we all have something or someone that we do love like that. Maybe it's a person that's fun to spend time with, even if we're not doing anything fun. Maybe it's a place. A place we love where we feel at home that we know by heart. Maybe it's a pet, a piece of artwork or a song, a band that we could listen to or spend time with forever that we know backwards and forwards inside out. And that love. Can bring joy. Now, Joy, may not be the only thing it brings. As Rodney said last week in his message, as Kathleen said and her message a few weeks ago, Beth Reverend, can all of our preachers in this series have noted that joy can hold so much more than just the happy stuff. It is that happy stuff, but it's also something bigger around it. Our joy knows that full complexity of our circumstances, and yet those circumstances can't remove that joy. Can't take it away. When we love with so much close attention. When we let ourselves. Take the time and the space to just delight in whatever it is that we love. We grow more joy in that space. We feed and water it right, and it gets bigger. It takes up more of that larger, more. With the tough stuff still there. But just like the balance of daylight and nighttime starts to change around this time of year at solstice.

[00:14:14] Speaker1

Our love and attention can start to shift the balance of joy and pain. If we help it grow. You know, we're trained to worry a lot. We are trained, I think, to worry about whether or not we are loved in this society, whether or not we are receiving enough of that love, whether we measure up and are good enough to be loved. I don't think we are as well trained to love, unfortunately. And that's a shame, because as I'm pointing out here, I think that process that act of loving is not just a virtue that we should be aspiring to for some high minded reason, it is also a joy creator. For us. And for the people around us. So whatever it is for you. You can tap into that ability to cultivate joy. When you allow yourself, as the great poet Mary Oliver says, to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves. To let the soft animal of your body love what it loves. There's a book on my Christmas list, like I literally don't have it yet, so full disclosure, I haven't read it, but I was excited as soon as I heard about it. Put it right on that Amazon wish list because it's my kind of thing. The book is called On Looking On Looking Eleven walks through expert eyes. The author is a woman named Alexandra Horowitz.

[00:15:52] Speaker1

And the book has a pretty simple but really cool premise. In the first chapter, she takes a walk around a boring Old City block in her town. And in that first walk, she just writes about what she notices, what she happens to see in this place where she lives. And it's kind of interesting, right? Someone walking around their own neighborhood taking notice of small things. But after that first walk. She invites one by one, 10 different companions to walk that very same block with her. And each of those people is a specialist, an expert in something. So in one chapter, she takes a walk around the block with an expert in typography, in fonts who points out all of the different kinds of lettering on the city, signs around her and what they tell us about the history of how old that building is, how old that business is, the history of the city and its development. In another chapter, she walks with an entomologist, a bug scientist who points out a billion things she missed on her walk, all of these little signs of life everywhere that you can find in an urban ecosystem, some of them are probably cockroaches, yes, but I bet there's other things too. There's a chapter where she walks with a sound engineer, one with a geologist, one with a city planner. I mean, to me, this sounds like just a delightful celebration of Naderi, really, I'm just being a nerd for something, right? And it points out how there are benefits to letting the soft animal of your body love what it loves right to geeking out over something.

[00:17:43] Speaker1

Loving it unabashedly. One of the commentaries, one of the reviews on this book said, you know, people who like birds see cool birds everywhere. People who love old architecture notice the magic all around them. I'm wondering today if you could name the things that you know, that you love that you are a nerd for. I would love to see in the chat. Kathleen, what are you nerd for? History of buildings, Kathleen raised her hand as soon as I said that, so I had to call on her. What are the things? Let us know in the chat that you geek out over that you are a nerd for that you love. Maybe you love to find the best ice cream place in every town you visit, where you collect tiny chicken statues, I don't know who might do that or you're always keeping an eye out for the color yellow or important sights from the Revolutionary War in the area. Maybe you love stand up comedy. You've seen every Netflix special out there. It doesn't matter to me what it is, but I hope you know for you. What is something you love? Because if you know what that is, you can be on the lookout for joy all the time.

[00:19:02] Speaker1

Joy makes all of this. More bearable. Unfortunately, it doesn't make the bad things go away. The world around us is going to keep throwing bad things our way in 2022. I hope they're not the worst things we can imagine, but I can unfortunately promise you it's not going to be all roses. And we can't just keep wishing. For it to go away. But we can recognize that fueling ourselves with joy is within our power to some extent. When we end up loving this world a little more. We end up wanting to make it a little better. And that's what we need. All of us working together with as much energy as we can muster. And the good news is we don't have to create it somehow just by pushing ourselves, we can look for it because it's out there. No matter how terrible the headlines, the cruelty, the despair. All of us have a source of joy that no one can take from us. Hopefully, you have many sources, right, diversify your joy. That's what they say in investments, right? In economics. Some big ones. Some small ones, some fast acting ones. Some slow ones that grow over time. Diversify your sources of sources of joy. Don't put it all in one family member, one friend, one close relationship. Let it also be dogs on the internet. Let it be hot beverages and birds in the sky and movies with your favorite actor in them, Don Cheadle, I don't know, I just took somebody but catalog the whole bunch of them for yourself.

[00:21:00] Speaker1

Oh, all the weird stuff on this Earth that you love. Make a list if you need to tack it right by your front door. So you can go out looking each day. If that feels selfish or silly, please remember that it's not because we need this fuel of our joy. The Yale Center for Faith and Culture has a project they've been running the past few years about the theology of joy, where they talk about a lot of these things. And one of the professors that they interviewed is a Baptist minister and theologian named Willie James Jennings. He said I look at Joy as an act of resistance against despair and cruelty and its forces. Joy, as an act of resistance. Powering our ability to engage suffering instead of ignore it if it doesn't belong to us. And reminding us always that there is more than that suffering. The challenges we faced can shift balance if we work at it just like the nighttime and the daytime. Every little piece of joy we cultivate and share helps. It all helps. And it's a good message for all of us at this time of year. As we get ready for the end of our service today for the end of this season. As we watch that great cosmic balance of night and day at the solstice begin to shift once again.

[00:22:43] Speaker1

This is the time in the Christian liturgical calendar called Advent. It's a whole season of waiting and watching. Before Christmas, before the birth of Jesus, the arrival in the Christian tradition of God on Earth. In human form. In the season of Advent this year, one of the first readings from Christian Scripture in the dictionary, the schedule of readings was from Jesus's words in the gospel of Luke. And every so often when I read ancient words, I realized that part of why they bring me comfort and I think why they bring so many people comfort is because they remind me that we humanity have been in tough places before. And we are still here. In the reading, Jesus says. There will be signs for you. Signs in the Sun and the Moon and the stars and on the Earth, distress among nations. Confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Sound familiar? He says when these things begin to take place. Stand up and raise your heads. Look. Because your redemption is drawing near. Look at the fig tree, he says. And all the trees. As soon as they sprout leaves, you can see and know that summer is coming. And when you see these things taking place, you will know that the Kingdom of God, heaven on Earth.

[00:24:40]

Is near. Look.

[00:24:44] Speaker1

Be alert. So that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life. Lest that day, catch you unexpectedly. For joy and redemption will come. To us all. These are certainly times of challenge and struggle. And they're also our chance to grow new things. They're a chance to remember that no one can take the source of our joy away from us because all of us are potential sources of each other's joy. All of us and not just us people, us plants, us animals, the sun and the sky, the Earth. Whoever the creator is of all of this. All of us out here, even if we don't know it, creating joy, leaving it right out in the open for others to find. My wish for you this December and into the new year ahead is to remember this. To simply stay on the lookout. For joy sent to the world. Amen. And may you live in blessing. Band's going to come back up here. Two of the band members for our last song, and in the meantime, I invite you to join me in the spirit of prayer.

[00:26:25] Speaker1

God of joy. Creator of everything that we see and know. And giver of our own lives. May we take a moment this morning to take in the enormity of that? If we can just see and feel a sliver of the enormity of the fact that we did not do anything to be here. That we were simply. Given onto this Earth. That our lives were a gift from somewhere else. And all we have to do is receive the days that we have. We will make so many mistakes in those days. And we will also encounter the grace of so much goodness. May we remember that all of it belongs? And that no one can take. The goodness and love that was given to us when we were created. I hope that each one of us is able to feel. At least a sliver, maybe a whole full moon. Of the light of that joy. This week and in the weeks to come. For the prayers, I've spoken and for the prayers that all of us gathered this morning, hold silently on our hearts. We say amen.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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