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Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
January 27, 2013

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a, Luke 4:14-21
"Christ and the Joy of Service"

Luke 4:14-21

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Today we ordain Sal Newton to the office of ruling elder. He joins the governing body of the church we call the session.

Our constitution as written in the *Book of Order* states: "The service of ordination...shall focus upon Christ and the joy and responsibility of serving him through the mission and ministry of the church, and shall include a sermon appropriate to the occasion." Thus, my sermon title: "Christ and the Joy of Service."

It's a three-part sermon.

Christ – Everything we do as Christians focuses on Christ. Jesus is our model for life and ministry. The Gospel of Mark states that Jesus "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45). We follow Jesus in a life for others.

Joy – What would life be without joy? Joylessness can happen to any of us and when it does life is a tough road. Jesus was called to a challenging ministry as indicated in today's gospel text but it begins with the spirit. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me..." he says in his opening salvo. Paul later describes "joy" as a fruit of the spirit. To be in Jesus is to know joy.

Service – The founder of the Methodist Church, John Wesley, wrote that “One of the principal rules of religion is, to lose no occasion of serving God. And, since God is invisible to our eyes, we are to serve God in our neighbor; which God receives as if done to God’s own self in person, standing visibly before us.” Jesus served God and so do we as we follow him.

Central to this sermon is the joy of serving. Medical missionary, Albert Schweitzer, says, “I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.”

I took Holy Communion to Helen this week and during the service I read the Beatitudes where each sentence begins with the word “blessed” which can also be interpreted as “happy.” I told her about the sermon this Sunday where “joy” is lifted up as central to our faith and service.

We agreed together that we are joyful because we are connected to God in Christ. Helen smiled and told the story of an African American woman who recently completed a three-day march for breast cancer research. She walked into the finish line at the end of the crowd and said: “This has been three days of joy.” Helen said others might have complained about sore legs. Helen had her sense of humor and joy even as she waited to be taken back to UCSF for yet another round of chemotherapy.

Francis of Assisi says “It is not fitting, when one is in God's service, to have a gloomy face or a chilling look.” There are no gloomy faces in our session (our governing body) and in the Board of Deacons (our care-giving group) or in our members. This is a joyful church even as we work on church health and growth.

God blesses us and blesses Sal in his ordination as we all continue to live for Christ in joy and service.