



First Mennonite Church

Midweek E-Newsletter

December 23, 2020

From Pastor Tom

Have Yourselves a Merry Little Christmas!

What does it mean to say to someone, “Merry Christmas?” For starters, is “merry” the same thing as “happy?” One of the definitions for the word merry in my desktop dictionary is “full of gaiety or high spirits.” Seems safe (and sad) to say that not everyone is going to be in high spirits this December 25. I would even venture that very few of us will be in high spirits this Christmas. Most of us are having to forego being with family (at least those who aren’t already in our “bubble”). Lois and I will be unable to be with our three daughters, their significant others, and our only granddaughter. Indeed (and it just occurred to me), this will be the first Christmas since we began having children that we won’t have them with us.

But at least Lois, brother John and I will be together. What about those who will spend Christmas being utterly alone? Do the words “merry Christmas” ring completely hollow if not downright painful? What about those who lost loved ones recently (or even not so recently)? And what about you? What will the phrase mean or how will it feel for you?

Maybe it’s okay this Christmas (or for that matter, any Christmas) to spend some time grieving. Grief is an unavoidable part of life. Perhaps even one side of life. Somehow it seems to be the most honest or to have the most integrity to simply acknowledge it—to spend some time on Christmas feeling sad.

Another definition for “merry” in my dictionary (in fact, the one marked “archaic”) is “giving pleasure: delightful.” That seems different. It seems possible to feel sad and experience pleasure and delight on the very same day, perhaps even at the same time. Lots of things, including very basic things, can give us pleasure and delight. A meal. A phone call. Opening a gift. Expressions of love or care offered by others. Reading Christmas greetings we have received. Remembering past pleasures. Maybe when we say to someone “Merry Christmas” what we are really saying is “May you experience some pleasure or delight this season and on that day.”

My dictionary also offered some synonyms for the word merry, including: “jovial,” “jolly,” “joyous.” Jovial, it explains, “suggests the stimulation of conviviality and good fellowship.” Similarly, jolly “suggests high spirits expressed in laughing, bantering, and jesting.” I like both of those. Neither necessarily precludes sadness or grief. Good fellowship can be found in a wide variety of places, some even unexpected. As we know from funerals, laughing and crying can often go hand in hand. Perhaps

the words “Merry Christmas” is a way of saying, “May you experience some good fellowship and humor amidst this often difficult season.”

But let’s come back to “joyous,” and its cognate “joy.” I preached on joy two Sundays ago (September 13, “Filled with Joy”). I proposed that joy is definitely not the same thing as happiness, that joy comes from knowing God’s nearness, from comfort when we are grieving, from signs of restoration in our own lives or in the world around us, from a sense of accomplishment (“bringing in the sheaves”), from loving justice as God loves it, from remembering our worth and worthiness in the eyes of God, from acknowledging those things for which we are thankful.

So maybe what I, at least, really mean when I say “Merry Christmas” is what I said at the very end of that sermon, and I say it again now. “May each one of you be filled with joy in the days and weeks and seasons to come.” In other words (singing now), “Have yourself a merry little Christmas!”

Ways to Help

- ☞ **It appears** that our faithful microwave in the church kitchen no longer works. If you would like to share one with FMC, we’d love that!
- ☞ **MCC Hygiene Kit** donations may be placed on the table in the Narthex.
- ☞ **MCC Comforter Blitz update:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 Kansas Friends of MCC Comforter Blitz in Yoder, KS has been canceled. However, the Blitz committee still has a goal of collecting at least 300 comforters between February and April. We need your help to meet this goal! Fabric kits and comforter sets to tie (top, back, and batting) are available to check out from MCC in North Newton. For contactless drop-off of completed comforters the 24-hour donation room is always available. To arrange drop-off or checkout materials, contact Kate at katemast@mcc.org, or 316.804.8432
- ☞ **Free resource from MCC: Learning about generosity!** Help children learn about generosity with MCC printable worksheets including activities, a story, a craft to make and Christmas gift ideas that benefit global neighbors with colorable greeting cards, find it all at mcc.org/generosity. Explore the full list of Christmas giving options from MCC at mcc.org/christmas.

Upcoming Events

- ☞ **Kauffman Museum at Bethel College** is partnering with Humanities Kansas to host the Smithsonian traveling exhibit “Crossroads: Change in Rural America” through Jan. 17. Accompanying it is a local companion exhibit, “Of Land and People: Our Community at the Crossroads,” created from the museum’s permanent exhibit “Of Land and People.” The museum is open 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Tues.-Fri (early close at 1 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 24, and Thursday, Dec. 31); 1:30-4:30 p.m., Sat.-Sunday; and closed Mondays and major holidays (Friday, Dec. 25, Friday, Jan. 1). Admission to the “Crossroads” exhibit is free on Saturdays.
- ☞ **Join MCC for a series of “MCC and me” webinars to hear more about service opportunities.** Are you ready to step out and into service? To gain new skills and experiences while working for relief, development and peace in the name of Christ? MCC is working to adapt our programming as the situation with COVID-19 develops. All sessions relate to anticipated

service needs, though timing and some other details may be subject to change. For more information and to register: mcc.org/mcc-me-webinar-series-service-opportunities.

January 13 at 3 p.m. EST: Summer Service leadership program

February 25 at 10 a.m. EST: Sharing With Appalachian People (SWAP) summer staff

February 25 at 8 p.m. EST: International service worker

March 6 at 12 p.m. EST: International service worker

March TBD: Mobile Meat Canner

Other Announcements

- ☞ **The WDC Garden December 2020/January/February 2021 issue** is now available for viewing at: <https://mennowdc.org/wdc-garden-december-2020-january-february-2021/>. Learn about how WDC is engaging with racial justice and cultural diversity, the impact of Covid-19 on Hispanic churches, an announcement about Sandra Montes-Martinez as the new WDC Associate Conference Minister (Texas-Based), and more!
- ☞ **Camp Mennoscah** is a wonderful place for family gatherings of whatever size! A variety of facilities fit any number of family groupings. Maybe you only need a space during the day for walking the trails or playing disc golf. There is plenty of outdoor space! Contact Camp Mennoscah at 620-297-3290 or office@campmennoscah.org to reserve!
- ☞ **SOOP** (Service Opportunities with our Partners) is accepting applications! Use your gifts and skills to work alongside others in a network of ministries across the church. Flexibly designed for retirees, families, and adults over 25. Visit MennoniteMission.net/SOOP to learn more!
- ☞ **Youth Venture** is accepting applications for summer 2021! Discover and experience the work that God is doing in the world with a team of other young people as you serve, learn, worship, and build relationships. Visit MennoniteMission.net/YouthVenture to learn more!

Weekly Inspirational/Encouraging Bible Verse

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. --[Luke 2:6-7](#)