

This morning I awoke to the sounds of my children playing in the living room. Often, it's the sounds of video games or television shows turned up way to loud that stirs me from my slumber, but this morning it was laughter. I wasn't expecting to hear laughter. Last night all of my sons, one by one, mentioned to me that today was their last day of summer holidays; and they did so with mixed emotions. It's not that they're not looking forward to returning to school, they absolutely are, but this year the return to school feels much different and so even though they are excited, they also have a nervousness that is above and beyond the normal first day jitters. Yet, I awoke to laughter.

They were laughing about something and not just a little laugh, it was that kind of laugh that can only be the result of pure joy; the rolling on the floor type of laughter. It made me smile as I laid in my bed and was reminded that even though there is so much going on around us that causes us concern and is out of our control, that joy still abounds.

A little Later on this morning I went with my middle son for a walk through of his new school. With masks on their faces, he and three other classmates got to see their classroom, met their teachers and staff and learned about all the important places like which door to use, where the bathroom was and the most exciting, how to get to the gym. As we walked into the school I nearly needed to jog to keep up with my son, he wanted so badly to get in there and check it out; and even though he and his classmates had masks on I could see the joy and the wonder in their eyes.

Every staff person they met, expressed joy; every single one. They seemed beyond excited to welcome these kids and genuinely made it feel like everything was going to be okay. Maybe those kids didn't need that, but I sure did. Around every corner and with every greeting was another masked, but smiling face. Even though there is uncertainty about what this school year will hold, joy was bouncing off the walls of that school. As we left, I said to my son, "So what did you think?" He answered, in way he often does, with a big smile and the words, "It's Awesome!"

It is awesome. It's awesome that in time such as this, in a time when we all have more questions than answers, that all of that doesn't stop joy from seeping into all of our everyday lives. Over the last months I have been encouraging all of you to take time to see the blessings and the grace of God around you. Those blessing are in the weeds that refuses to go away and can grow no matter what. Those blessings are the in stars that twinkle and shine and make us awe struck. Those blessings are in the wisdom of our elders and the in the hope of our children and youth. Those blessings are sometimes hard to see, but are there.

In other times though, those blessings are not hard to see. Take today as an example. It is currently 11:34am and my cup is overflowing with joy. I awoke to the sounds of laughter, there is nothing sweeter than that. I was greeted with the beauty of a warm sunny day. The thought of school tomorrow, which even an hour ago felt daunting, feels less daunting and less scary

thanks to the amazing staff of our schools who took the time to say hello and welcomed my son today with grace and hope.

My friends, life, though it has changed, is still so good. There is so much to laugh about, so much to be thankful for.

***Joy abounds!***

Blessing to you all this wonderful day

Sincerely,

Rev. Adam Hall