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Welcome back from your holiday adventures, welcome back to a new year.

Apparently, this year resolutions are terribly out of fashion. I want to share a New Year's practice that's been going around in community circles—instead of setting resolutions, some are simply choosing one word as inspiration. The premise is simple—looking out into next year, the practice invites you to reflect on a quality, a characteristic or a project you want to focus on for the coming year. The idea is that resolutions can be too clunky, too heavy, too shame inducing, and most of all, too easy to forget. But one word can be a focal point, a meditation, a vision which is easy to carry with us. One word can be a prayer you repeat to yourself in difficult times, an affirmation which inspires you. I encourage you to try this practice. The word can really be anything. I read one blog where the word was charcuterie. Now I'm not sure of how she found the meaning there, but no judgment! So I've been working with this practice for myself, and for us as a congregation, mulling over what our one word could be. For a minister who likes MANY words, one word is not an easy ask. I'll make you guess what my one word for myself might be, but one word that keeps coming up for our congregation is the word "joy." Joy—such a short word for such an important concept in our lives.

As a congregation, I think we can be quite serious at times. I know that I can be quite serious myself. Together we are engaged in the important and meaningful work—the work of spiritual development, introspection and critical reflection. The work of raising families and personal growth. The work of resistance and justice making. I think sometimes we turn away from joy, thinking that we are too busy for it, or we feel guilty for experiencing it—maybe we think the world is in too much need for us to take our eyes off it for a moment and experience joy. Maybe we think that joy is for other people with more free time, or that church should be more serious than fun and playful.

Maya Angelou once said "We need joy as we need air. We need Love as we need water. We need each other as we need the earth we share."



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Joy keeps us laughing, joy keeps us honest. In a culture where we live on the precipice between one disaster and another, joy outshines fear by keeps us present, in the moment, noticing the beauty and abundance available to us even in the most challenging times.

So for today's service, I wanted to lead with this word—and share with you two incredible people to bring us joy in the form of glitter, laughter and deep authenticity. For our year ahead, how can we be more joyful as a congregation?

I'd love to hear your ideas.

I've been thinking about more singing with gusto, more potlucks with this beautiful chosen family we share, and more spontaneity. We are a large ship to turn and sometimes we find change difficult. But my hunch is that if we share more of the things that bring us joy in our lives and bring more joy to each other, we might find ourselves feeling more present and connected as a congregation. For the year ahead, I think about us trying new things together with an attitude of openness and curiosity, welcoming new ideas and accepting new partnerships. I think of us hesitating less and saying yes more, looking at each new connection we make as an opportunity for healing and growth, an opportunity for us to be known, and to be loved. I leave you with a poem from Mary Oliver for our new year's blessing. "Don't Hesitate."

If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate.

Give in to it.

We are not wise, and not very often kind.

And much can never be redeemed.

Still life has some possibility left.

Perhaps this is its way of fighting back,

that sometimes something happened better than all the riches or power in the world.

It could be anything, but very likely you notice it in the instant when love begins.



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Anyway, that's often the case.

Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid of its plenty.

Joy is not made to be a crumb. (Don't Hesitate)

May the promise of the new year unfold in beauty, for our lives, our children's lives, and for our world.

May it be so