

BLESSINGS ALWAYS
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Association Minister Message
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JOY. In the fall of 1963, Bob Dylan wrote a song, *"The Times They Are A-Changin."* When he wrote it the lyrics called for social change and was a commentary on the political and cultural turmoil of that time. There were many protests, marches, and acts of violence that tried to recognize the discontent and anger at what some thought were unfair practices and lack of respect for differing opinions. Even today there is a recurrence of disrespect of differing opinions and fear of welcoming persons who look, speak, and act differently than *"like us."* *JOY* is evasive in personal relationships and social settings. It is challenging to find common ground with others when judgments and lack of respect prevail.

The four gospels each have a way of describing Jesus and the early development of the Christian Church. John's emphasis is *JOY*, especially evident in John 12 when Jesus visits the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Jesus recently raised Lazarus from the dead and you can imagine the *JOY* and gratitude in that household to have their brother alive and with them especially at the important festival of Passover. *"Mary took an extraordinary amount, almost three-quarters of a pound, of very expensive perfume made of pure nard. She anointed Jesus' feet with it, then wiped his feet dry with her hair. The house was filled with aroma of the perfume."* (John 12). Mary sacrificed her nard that would have been used for her burial ritual. She expressed *JOY*, thanksgiving, and sacrifice in gratitude to Jesus for restored life of Lazarus to the family. Judas Iscariot, the treasurer of the disciples, was *JOY-less* *"not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief."* (v. 6).

How do we receive, live, and share *JOY* in the midst of changing times? The gathered community of faith has *JOY* as it remembers, experiences, and has hope for God's new life, especially as it emerges in the midst of death, conflict, hatred, disrespect, and evil. *"The house was filled with the aroma of the perfume."* (vs. 3). Better than perfume, God's Spirit permeates the creation with *JOY* and our lives have abundant living. Thanks be to God. *BLESSINGS ALWAYS*.