

Joy!

Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

May 6, 2024

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (Philippians 4:4)

This is the day that the Lord has made; **let us rejoice** and be glad in it.

(Psalm 118:24)

... for the **joy of the Lord** is your strength. (Nehemiah 8:10b)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy (Romans 15:13)

Our theme today is Joy!

Last week we encountered through John's gospel
an Ethiopian traveler, a pilgrim searching for meaning in life.
As the scripture he is reading is explained by Jesus' disciple Philip,
As he learns about God's love manifested in the world in Jesus,
He feels an indwelling presence of love
that he realizes has been his quest all along
and he wants to commit his life
to what has opened up for him through the scriptures
in this train compartment with this stranger named Philip.
He wants to be baptized immediately.
Once he is baptized, he and Philip part ways
And he goes on toward home – rejoicing.

When I was little, my grandmother would get me to memorize verses
- not of scripture, but of poetry.
And so, I learned the words of the poet John Keats:
A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.

His poem goes on to say that such a joy is lasting:

Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
At the end of his poem:
These things of beauty
... become a cheering light
Unto our souls, and bound to us so fast,
That, whether there be shine, or gloom o'er-cast;

They always must be with us, for our whole life.

No matter how long it lasts, or how many times we feel it,
Joy welling up within us is always a new song.

What is your forever new song?
To see the face of one you love?
To feel the wind in your face when you are riding your bicycle down a big hill?
Or facing into the wind as the bow of your boat cuts through the waters?
Each spring, the first day that you see tiny green shoots coming forth from the seeds you tucked into the trays under the grow lights?

The Ethiopian had been searching moving toward God.
When he found himself IN God, in Jesus, that is when joy arose in him.

Jesus tells us joy can be found and kept –
when we abide in him, like branches drawing life from,
and extending out from, the vine.
It is in that ever flowing connected current of life from God, the vinegrower,
who gives the warmth of the sun,
and the swelling of the rain, and the strengthening wind,

When we are connected with our life-giver, joy runs through us.
And while our joy can be abiding, it is always new – and renewing.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.
I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you,
And that your joy may be complete.

When we don't feel joy, there are promises through the ages that it will indeed return.

Psalm 126:5
"Those who sow in tears shall reap with **shouts of joy!**"

1 Peter 4:13
Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the **wonderful joy** of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.

John 16:20 – You will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. So you have pain now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

Psalm 30:5 Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

James 1:2 Whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance;

Proverbs 17:22 A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

Romans 12:15

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Parker Palmer, who in his own life, has survived dark nights of the soul writes this:

It requires no special talent or effort to look at our world and point out the things that numb us, or dumb us down, or depress us. In fact, it's a no-brainer! But becoming keenly and consistently aware of what's good, true, beautiful, and life-giving around us and within us demands a discipline: we must open our eyes, minds, and hearts. And we must keep them open.

The reward for that discipline is great: as we open up, we start to see beauty everywhere, not only in nature, but in human nature. There's a lot of bad news out there, but there's a lot of good news as well. Pass the word and help keep hope alive.

Mindful (by Mary Oliver)

Every day

I see or I hear

something

that more or less

kills me

with delight,

that leaves me
like a needle
in the haystack
of light.

It is what I was born for –
to look, to listen,
to lose myself
inside this soft world –
to instruct myself
over and over
in joy,
and acclamation.

And so, beloved, let's keep always looking for joy.
May our abiding in the Life-Giver store the hope and joy we need
through the dark days.
When joy shows up, even in familiar places, may it always surprise us
and fill us with a new song.