

Sunday, May 16, 2021 Psalm 1, James 1:2-8 John 17:6-19

Making Joy Complete

What do you think of when you hear the word “joy”? In 1949, Proctor and Gamble started making a liquid dish detergent naming it “joy”. Later on this company launched this product with the fragrance of lemons and this helped to begin the overall trend toward citrus-scented cleaning products. By washing dishes with this cleaning product one was to experience joy because the task was made easier and the lemon fresh aroma helped make the task less strenuous and maybe even ‘joyful’! No longer a P&G product, “joy” is still being made and sold and to clean dishes in households across the United States. The Joyful part of this dish detergent was that it contained ingredients to protect the user's hands from drying out.

Prior to his arrest, trial and crucifixion, Jesus shared the Passover with his closest friends. He then spoke to them and shared with them about the situation which would soon develop. He also prayed for them and with them. This prayer time was before he went into the Garden of Gethsemane. It was while they were finishing their dinner that Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father the hour has come glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you since you have given him authority over all people to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. “

This statement marks the beginning of Jesus’ prayer in the presence of his disciples when he speaks to God and asks God to protect them. He asks God to protect them in the way God protected him so that they may be one as we are one. He then states as a prayer that they ‘may have my joy made complete in themselves’. Just what is Jesus asking for his close friends to have? That they may have joy made complete.

Jesus is God’s Son as witnessed by the angels in Bethlehem and the shepherds who worshiped him in the stable. We read in Hebrews 1:9 that Jesus was anointed with the oil of joy by God because he loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. This means that Jesus loved, delighted in, had integrity, virtue, and an uprightness in purpose, thought and action. He did not like lawlessness, injustice and iniquity. Throughout Jesus’ earthly life righteousness was displayed and it was Jesus who wanted his followers to have and know the things that would bring them into the full measure of His joy.

In our world today much emphasis is placed on happiness and joy. Yet there seems to be little on the news that is happy or joyful unless it is a story showing and sharing love just before the news broadcast ends. But rarely are these feel good stories remembered let alone shared like the headlines. But what does it mean to be happy? A definition for ‘happy’ is feeling or showing pleasure or contentment. We often see smiles on faces or a sparkle or twinkle in one’s eye if there is a notion of happiness. For many people, the idea of being happy is one of the most sought after experiences of life. And it is this feeling that parents strive to obtain for their children and as the children grow older, it is for them to be happy. Happiness is a choice.

Charlie Brown states: "The smile on my face doesn't mean my life is perfect. It means I appreciate what I have or what I have been blessed with. I choose to be happy." There is a difference between being happy and filled with joy. Maybe you have experienced situations where you really were not very happy but for some reason, the joy that dwells within you still remains. This is the same with Jesus. Jesus' personal circumstances were not always 'happy' and yet His joy was full. Happy has to do with external HAPPEN-INGS, and Jesus lived from the inside out.

In the movie "Inside Out" we are taken into the head of an 11-year-old girl named Riley whose five emotions: Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust are embodied by characters who help this girl navigate her world. These emotions help her as she moves from one city to another and as she grows up and learns that there is more to being happy than boundless positivity. In fact, in the film's final scenes, Joy cedes control to some of her fellow emotions, particularly Sadness, Riley seems to achieve a deeper form of happiness.

This is also true as Jesus desires this internal joy to be experienced by all his followers. Joy is found down in the heart. It is internal and is a work of the Holy Spirit. Joy flows from our connection with God the Father. IF you have a connection with God you may experience this internal joy. But you might also experience joy if you make it happen.

A short animated film brings a new perspective of a man and his dog fishing early in the morning. While the man puts worms on the fishing line, the dog sees a heron who is searching for food particularly worms. The dog barks and disturbs the fisherman but his bark only warns the man that the heron is taking his worms. A few moments go by and the heron returns trying to get more worms. The dog barks again but is silenced by the fisherman. The dog prevents the big bird from getting the worms. Then as the heron flies away from the boat we see the heron go to its nest where three young birds are waiting for their food. When the heron fails to bring worms back, she offers a fish but they turn their noses away. The dog witnesses this then puts all the worms on the side of the boat. He calls the heron back and the bait is taken to the young birds. OF course the dog realizes that he has given the bait away. But soon after the heron returns with many fish in its beak and dumps them all over the boat, much to the surprise of the fisherman. But to the dog and the heron, there is much joy.

From where does joy come? It comes from living with a clear conscience, being, doing right, and making right choices and knowing that in God's sight there is hope.

We know that the lockdown has been extended to June 2 in order to reduce the number of new cases of covid19. The restrictions we have been living under continue and for some people this is very difficult. But there is hope as vaccinations are now approved for youth which will be given later on. There is also hope that as more people are vaccinated, we can return to socializing= but just not yet. So in the meantime we need to look for moments of celebration, or hope and we must take time to find joy in our life. So where do you find joy?

Joy is found in the little things. The song birds sing first thing in the morning. Or being recognized by someone you have not seen in a while. Or seeing the sunrise/ sunset from a lake cliff or hill. Or in the movement of a spider as it emerges from its web. Or even seeing the web design after rain.

Joy is found in these things and this feeling once experienced stays within us and we are forever changed. Yet we might have other emotions—grief, guilt, fear, wonder, hurt- but the joy that we have within us comes from Jesus if we believe that life offers us opportunities to be sad, down or happy and joyful. Are we willing to choose joy?

In this season of Easter, we have learned more about Jesus and his teachings about who he is and can be for all people. He taught those who were closest to him what it means to be disciples in faith in Him and to believe that his death and resurrection would happen and bring a whole new way of thinking to all. Over 2000 years later we are still learning about this new way of living love. We are living in a global pandemic where leaders are asking each other to share solutions, resources and through these things- hope. Jesus taught people that to truly understand what right living is about means to live with love in our hearts knowing however we will never fully live as Christ did. But Jesus laid the foundation for what it means to be filled with joy. As one of the gifts of the Spirit, joy is one of the gifts we are to bear as fruit as we are connected to the Vine, Jesus. But we are called to bear this fruit and if we bear this fruit we are living love, sharing hope and belong to Christ.

We read in James that whenever we face trials of any kind, they are to be considered nothing but joy. This seems odd but when our faith is tested, endurance is produced. In order to have endurance having its full effect, we will grow and mature and become complete. We will then lack nothing. That is, our joy will be fully known and completed. When this occurs we will be in the presence of God who created and loved us so much. But in the meantime we are to continue to grow and mature, to produce spiritual gifts and live as Christ taught.

After Jesus finished teaching these matters with his disciples he left them and went into the garden to pray to God alone. He knew what lay ahead of him and he struggled knowing that he had to fulfill God's promise. But one thing is for sure the disciples knew Jesus for who he was and what he did. They came to fully realize that Jesus is the Christ, the messiah, the Saviour.

But what about you? Do you know the Risen Christ of Easter? Do you know the one who is the True Vine, the good shepherd and the one in whom we find all joy? IT is the intent of God that all his faithful children will live in the fullness of joy. As we consider who we are, let us be reminded of God's grace given to us through Jesus. For it is in Jesus' name that we are forgiven, set free and enabled to live and serve again. This is the message of Easter. This is the story of the Risen Christ. Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Hallelujah.

Let US PRAY

God of joy and wonder we praise you and thank you that Jesus rose from death and through this act of love, offers to us forgiveness and the hope of eternal life with you. Bless us O God and enable us to find joy in our hearts, joy in your presence and the joy which comes from within through your Spirit. You call us to live and love others in your name. Enable us to experience the wonder and joy of Christ's love today and evermore. We ask in the name of our Saviour, Jesus the Risen Christ. Amen.