

Text: Psalm 126

Title: Present day joy - I dare you!

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Objectives:

Exploring what it means to celebrate the joys of the past, be present to the joy of today, and letting another's joy infect us, and give up our suspicion of joy.

Joy is.... How would you complete that sentence?

Joy is... Take a moment to think. Why don't you tell the person nearest to you. Joy is...

Poet David Whyte says:

Joy is a meeting place, of deep intentionality and of self forgetting.

Joy is affection, skin touching skin, singing in the car, music in the kitchen, and the quiet irreplaceable and companionable presence of a friend.

Poet Mary Oliver says: Joy is not made to be a crumb.

Poet John O Donehue likens joy to a sea coming home to shore or the feeling of laughter rinsing through your soul.

There is a desert in Namibia bordering South Africa, called Namaqualand. 10 months of the year it is cracked, dry and scorching hot.

Yet every year at exactly same the time in late September, following the first spring rain fall, tiny seeds burrow into the once cracked earth and produce carpets of daisies.

Red, purple, orange, magenta, bright yellow and white. Lasting only about 8 weeks of the year.

It's a picture of the fleeting surprise of joy.

God's creation of something quite unexpected in the least likely places...

The words, pictures and form of Psalm 126 tell a similar story about the nation of Israel's joy.

It is a Psalm of ascent - a psalm prayed or sung during the communities pilgrimage to Jerusalem each year.

In the middle of the Psalm - the centre - the focal point (verse 3) - the writer of Psalm 126 uses the Hebrew phrase:

hā·yî·nū śə·mê·hîm.

We are becoming Joy.

A people of joy. An identity. A way of being.

And it is in the present tense.

The words preceding this phrase are in the past tense.
They are memories of times gone by.
Especially with reference to the Exile (children's talk).

When we...
When Yahweh brought us back together...
Then we...
Then the nations said of us...

But joy cannot be experienced from the past - although we can remember times of joy
- and in the recollection, experience renewed joy.
The experience of joy is in the present.

And the words following the phrase in verse 3... are in the future.

They are prayers prayed in anticipation with hope.

Because friends, joy cannot be manufactured. We cannot make it happen.
What we can do... is
... facilitate the conditions for the possibility of joy.

We can open up to it, though the experience of joy is never guaranteed.

We open up to it by working against cynicism...

- cynicism is self protection, cynicism is fear that is clothed
- cynicism is when we worry about being perceived as caring too much, being too eager, buying in too much, afraid of disappointment or looking like a fool

Opening up to joy is daring to be whole hearted again, trying new things and this takes courage.

We also open up to joy by sharing it and receiving it...

- Joy is meant to be shared - it is practiced generosity.
- It is most readily a quality that is cultivated in a community.
- Joy can be contagious. If we are open to receive it from someone.

Joy bubbles over. Joy is talked about. Joy is shared laughter.
Joy is a present delight, celebrated together.

So we can facilitate the conditions for the possibility of joy.

And we need to be mindful of this...

Though Joy cannot be created by us...
Joy can certainly be destroyed by us...

It's that moment when a young child walks into a room with a painting of a tree - eyes sparkling, bubbling with excitement to show someone...

And one by one the adults comment:

- why didn't you wear your apron, look at your shirt
- or: what's that? You can do better, I can't even see the leaves
- or: trees have green leaves not purple leaves, silly!

Joy can be destroyed... and my friends adults do it to each other also.

- Through over control - not leaving any room for surprise.
 - Words like "this is the way it is always done here!"
 - Or that's never going to work - we've tried it before.
- Or through a demand for 100% perfection - an all or nothing attitude, not celebrating well-meaning attempts.
 - This doesn't mean we can't give feedback, but let's check our expectations of each other.
- Or joy can be destroyed by constant criticism - that undercuts someone's contribution. Like Judas does to Mary in today's gospel reading.

That's why we have the word killjoy...

A killjoy is a person who spoils the fun for someone else. You may be a killjoy if everyone's enjoying their meal at a restaurant and you complain constantly about the terrible service.

The first instance of the word killjoy was recorded in 1776, and its meaning kind of makes sense: a killjoy kills everyone else's joy.

Now we may have come by this negative critical attitude honestly...

There is a scene in the second book/film of Lord of the Rings. Where three riders are searching for their missing hobbit friends. And they have been riding for days, and are relying on the kindness of others they meet to help them on their way. And then they meet a small group of horsemen, who are protecting their land - who draw their swords and are about to attack.

They engage in a lengthy conversation. And in the middle of the conversation. The leader admits the reason for their negative distrust...

He says:

"There is trouble now on all our borders and we are threatened, but we desire only to be free, and to live as we have lived, keeping our own, and serving no foreign lord, good or evil. We welcomed guests kindly in the better days, but in these times the unbidden stranger finds us swift and hard"

Lord of the Rings: The two towers J R R Tolkien, p, 37

St Catherine's community, you have had quite the journey:

There were the glory days.

- Sunday school overflowing, pews full all the way to the back row!
- Families, baptisms, weddings...

We remember the joy.

When God did this for us, we were like people who dreamed.
Then our mouths were filled with laughter.

And the Edgemont Neighbours said of us: now there is a faith community who trusts in God!

And so... How are we now?
And what are we praying for the future?

Are we open to possibility?
Even to the idea that joy may come in new ways.
Like a dream.

That joy could be a meeting place, of deep intentionality and of self forgetting.

So when someone expresses an idea with joy:
We say:
- Let me hear more...
And not...
- We tried that before...

Or when someone tries something new or different:
We say:
- How did it go? Can I help?
And not...
- That's not going to work.

St Catherine's I challenge you...
Dare to open up to possibility?
Dare to experiment - even if it doesn't go the way we plan?
Dare to let others try, try and try again?
Have the courage to put down our suspicion of joy.

For Joy is evidence of Spirit. It's fruit - a visible outgrowth of a life of faith.

A Chinese proverb says:
"If I keep a green bough in my heart, the singing bird will come"

Joy is... Who we are becoming.