

Authentic Joy!

December 17, 2023. Rev. Dr. David Thompson

*In Thy presence is fullness of joy; In Thy right hand there are pleasures forever
Psalm 16: 11.*

When we think about joy it is not quite the same as happiness is it? It has a haunting quality of anticipation in it often for something greatly desired but not available- a future hope, or a dream that we wonder whether it will ever come true. Very often joy comes after suffering, or a long denial of a dream that suddenly comes true.

A businessman in New York was standing one day in front of his office window looking at the street below when all of a sudden a woman in a car caught his eye. She looked at him and he waved at her, watching her amused reaction as she asked her husband who might be waving at them? That started him on a project to wave from his window at people. Gradually he had a huge following as he dressed for special occasions and held up signs.

The passengers on the 4:40 bus from the docks were his special fans as they were all on the bus everyday at the same time.

The man and his wife were expecting their first child. Less than a month before the birth, he posted a sign in the window, "25 DAYS UNTIL 'B' DAY." The next day the sign read, "24 DAYS UNTIL 'B' DAY." Each day the number dropped, and the passing people grew more curious.

One day a sign appeared on the 4:40 bus, "What is 'B' DAY?" He just waved and smiled.

Ten days before the expected date, the sign in the window read, "10 DAYS UNTIL BA-- DAY." The next day it read, "9 DAYS UNTIL BAB- DAY," then "8 DAYS UNTIL BABY DAY." His fans finally knew what was happening.

By then, his following had grown to include twenty or thirty different buses and cars. Every night, they watched to see if his wife had given birth. The number of days decreased and excitement grew. His fans were disappointed when the count reached "zero" without an announcement. The next day the sign read, "BABY DAY 1 DAY LATE". He pretended to pull out his hair.

Each day the number changed and the interest from passing traffic grew. His wife was fourteen days overdue before she finally went into labor. Their daughter was born the next morning. He left the hospital at 5:30 AM, *screaming his joy into the morning air*, and drove home to sleep. He got up at noon, bought cigars, and appeared at the window in time for his rush hour fans. His co-workers were ready with a banner posted in the window:

"IT'S A GIRL!"

His co-workers joined in the celebration. They stood and waved cigars in the air, as every vehicle that passed acknowledged the birth of his daughter. Finally, the 4:40 bus from the docks made its turn onto the overpass and began to climb the hill. When it drew close, he climbed onto the window ledge and clasped his hands over his head in a victory pose. The bus was directly in front of him when it stopped in heavy traffic, and every person on board was on their feet, hands in the air.

He was choked up with emotion as he watched them celebrate his new daughter.

Then it happened—a sign popped up. It filled the windows and stretched half the length of the bus. "CONGRATULATIONS!" it read.

Tears formed in the corners of his eyes as the bus slowly resumed its journey. He stood in silence as it pulled away from view. More fans passed. They tooted their horns and flashed their lights to congratulate him. He hardly noticed them, as he pondered what had just happened.

His daughter had been born fourteen days late. Those people must have carried that sign for 2 weeks. Each day they must have unrolled it and then rolled it back up. The thought of them going to so much effort just to celebrate his new baby made him cry.

That day, more than twenty years ago, changed him. He had just wanted to make his own day better. ***He didn't realize how it might affect others.***

Do we get that? That when we are joyful it's infectious?

In the Jewish tradition at the time of Jesus there was a feeling among many Jews that the coming of the Messiah was immanent. Certainly Simeon the Jewish temple priest felt that. Simeon was so excited. When he saw the baby, he saw the whole purpose of his long life fulfilled. He had wanted to see the action of God in history in the coming of the Jewish messiah. He believed that he would not see death until he had seen the Christ. So when he came into the temple and saw Jesus he burst out with these words:

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."

For Simeon this experience had all the defining characteristics of genuine joy: A very long wait and then sudden fulfillment.

The Messianic expectation is still maintained by religious Jews even today as they await the coming of the Messiah. These Jews believe that the conditions of the Messiah for earthly rule were not fulfilled by Jesus. But many Jews today are justly proud of Jesus as a Jewish rabbinical teacher who brought their Scriptures and ethical monotheism to the world at large, and so his coming was a good thing, all things considered, despite what the followers of Jesus have done to the Jewish people in times of persecution in History. They feel that his original teachings did not justify the behavior that the church engaged in. Many Christians today agree with that.

Interestingly also in Islam, Jesus is considered to be a Messenger of God and the Messiah who was sent to guide the Children of Israel with a new scripture, the Gospel ... It states that Jesus was born to Mary as the result of virginal conception, a miraculous event which occurred by the decree of God. (Wikipedia)

But you say to me, David there are many reasons today to be joyless. What about the civilian tragedies of Palestine, Israel and the Ukraine? What about the desperately poor in Stratford? What about the abused women with young children being forced to live behind locked doors in Optimism place? What about people we know whose marriage has collapsed? What about those with a cancer diagnosis? What about young children seeing their parents split up just before Christmas? What about those who have lost a dear one just before Christmas? What about those for whom this will be the first Christmas without their lifelong companion?

On the global level there is the failure to address global climate change, which may end the world civilization, as we know it. The economy with 8% inflation has left many without jobs, *unable to sustain a place to live*. There are people, experiencing, poverty, homelessness and addiction. On CBC yesterday there was a food bank featured. The woman in charge said that she knew of one woman who after paying rent had \$36 dollars left for everything else. You say to me ' David however can you go on talking about joy in such a gloomy world?

Well let me turn it back to you! What is the alternative? Are we all to go into victimhood? Are we to give up on the human project on earth? Are we going to let tragedy have the last word?

C.S. Lewis says that **joy is the serious business of heaven**. Joy is not some flip answer to small problems. Joy can be a passionate response to Life, despite all the difficulties! Why? Because we can choose to be happy anyway! There are people who have learned to be joyful, no matter what's going on. Personally, I want to be one of them! I know some of you do too!

So lets ask: How do we get there?

Do some people have a head start on us because joy is genetic disposition? Perhaps! Because we do find people who seem to be born naturally joyful. Also, most children, in their innocence, are joyful if all is well and they are secure. But most of us whether serious by nature or joyful, are able at least to remember *times* when we were joyful!

I remember as a child getting up every morning and I could not wait for the daylight to come, I was so turned on with life. I would get so excited at Christmas I would have an asthma attack on Christmas Eve every year like clockwork!

And if we can **remember** being joyful as children, we can get back there again even if we think we have lost the key, for as the great Italian film director Fellini once said: “ No matter what happens, always keep your childish innocence. It’s the most important thing. Live ... never losing your childish enthusiasm and things will come your way.”

Sure it is, that really depressed persons, who have a chemical imbalance, have a much harder struggle than the so-called ‘normal’ person who has a better-regulated chemistry. But in today’s world there are drugs to help us recover equilibrium and if at all possible, we should take them under a doctor’s care and stay with them, to lighten our moods and steady them.

Dr Nancy O’Reilly, a psychologist, says that we can actually choose to be joyful by following 10 practical steps to joy:

- 1) Make it a habit to notice what is right in a situation, not what’s wrong. That is huge because we always pay far more attention to what is wrong than what is going well as the Media know! Let’s not imitate the media!
- 2) Be grateful! Make a list of things you are grateful for and you will be amazed how that changes your mood.
- 3) Remember the child who you once were who still lives inside you! Take time out for pure fun for your inner child. Be playful!!
- 4) Be kind to someone and you will get a joyful feeling. Works every time!
- 5) Spend time with those you love.
- 6) Don’t overdo by trying to be all things to all people. Learn to say no.
- 7) Rest. Find a quiet haven for yourself especially if you are overworked
- 8) Put a smile on your face. If you can’t smile grin. Wave out your window at rush hour traffic. It works!
- 9) Pursue your goals by **finding your calling in life**.
- 10) Give back to life

There are I feel, **master keys** to joy that unlock all doors and help them to open even under the worst circumstances. The first is found in our Old Testament text today.

The text affirms that joy is about experiencing **the actual reality of the Presence of God**. The Psalmist says:

*In **Thy** presence is fullness of joy; In **Thy** right hand there are pleasures forever*
Psalm 16: 11.

I don't think that we will be finally successful about finding joy without this truth, that Joy is found in God's presence.

The way to experience the presence of God is to pray and meditate, get still inside yourself, for a few moments every day- that will draw you closer than anything else to God. Prayer with a partner is magic!

A second master key is to believe in your heart of hearts with St. Paul, that all things, whatever they are, can work for good. Why? Because God loves us. That difficulty, that crisis you are facing whatever it is, give the burden of it over to God! Let it go! Things will work out in the long haul! Trust!!

The third master key is to maintain your **hope** index high, as Simeon did, and don't give up even if your goals are not reached in your lifetime. Keep the faith!
Keep on believing in the power of your dreams.

In 1967 Jenna was in love with David, a boy from the poor side of town. Jenna's controlling father disapproved of David and forbade Jenna to see him. But Jenna and David, with the help of friends managed to get to see each other. Jenna got pregnant and her father threw a fit and demanded that the baby be given up for adoption.

He sent Jenna away to live with an aunt until the baby was born.

David the boy from the wrong side of the tracks was heartbroken at the forced separation and joined the army to serve in Vietnam.

He wrote many letters from Vietnam to Jenna but Jenna's father intercepted them and threw them all out.

David tried to write to Jenna's friends in the hope that they would be able to get in touch with her, but to no avail.

Jenna never received any letters and did not know how to get in touch with David. She did come home after the birth of her baby. She dreamed about the child often. She wondered what the adoptive parents were like. Would she ever see him again?

She stayed in school and graduated and went to college leaving town to take a good job in the city.

Memories of her first love and lost child caused Jenna never to marry. She knew that one day it was likely that her son would call to find his birth mother, as that

was trend in the social media. Some *thirty years* after the birth, one day that telephone call came out of the blue.

A voice she almost recognized began,

“Is this Jenna?” The voice sounded just like David’s. In her gut she knew this had to be her lost son. He said his name was Bradley.

“Can we meet soon?” he asked.

Jenna agreed to meet him. He would have to fly in to the city where she was.

After she hung up the phone she wished she had asked Bradley whether he had ever managed to find his father David. She let the thought die within her. She began instead to prepare for Bradley’s visit.

The days dragged on. Her emotions flew all over the place. Would Bradley ask why she had given him up for adoption? What if he didn’t like her? What if he didn’t understand?

Finally, the day arrived and Jenna went to the airport to meet him. She paced the floors and bit her nails. She got as close to the gate as she could, craning her neck. A lifetime of regrets filled her mind.

Suddenly she saw him and intuitively they knew each other. Then there he was right in front of her. He opened his arms and she leaped into them as he lifted her clear off the floor for their first ever hug denied by time and fate. They held each other and cried for several minutes.

Bradley had brought his own family with him. There was his wife, a little grandson and his older sister. Jenna hugged them all!

Suddenly the little boy ran over to someone who had been hanging around in the background.

“Grandpa!” he yelled.

Jenna spun around. Could it be?? It can’t be! Could it really be David after all these years?

The little boy was running to David his grandfather, and David picked him up and then put him down and fastened his eyes again **on the long lost love of his life!** In an instant he reached Jenna and she was in his arms and was held for a long, long time before they pulled apart just to look at each other.

The weekend visit ended far too soon for them all, but Bradley and his family had to get back and they made Jenna promise to visit as soon as she was able.

When they all got to the airport together, Jenna asked David where he was flying out from?

David paused and then said, "I'm not. I've decided to extend my vacation. I think that we have a lot of years to make up for."

Christmas that year was filled with the most amazing joy as Bradley saw his parents actually marry! And they were able to see the destiny of the cosmos, **but in their lifetimes**: like Simeon in Advent who held a baby born out of wedlock, they were able to see the cosmic law of **Final Joy** written in their own lives; that all things finally work together for good...

So may it be for us! And God willing, in our lifetimes!

God bless you!!!!!!!