

Sermon, July 29, 2018

WORD FOR THE DAY: JOY

CALL TO WORSHIP from Psalm 138

O Lord, you search me and you know me; you know my resting and my rising; you discern my thoughts from afar. You mark when I walk or lie down; all my ways lie open to you.

Response: Lord, you have made me and you know me.

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell at the sea's furthest end, even there your hand would lead me, your right hand hold me fast.

Response: Lord, you have made me and you know me.

For it was you who created my being, knit me together in my mother's womb. I thank you for the wonder of my being, for the wonders of all your creations.

Response: Lord, you have made me and you know me.

HYMN NCH #84 "This Is the Day"

CHILDREN'S SERMON
ANNOUNCEMENTS

SCRIPTURE READING
Psalm 16: 7-11

⁷I will bless the LORD who counsels me—
even at night when my thoughts trouble me.^[d]

⁸I always let the LORD guide me.^[e]

Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.

⁹Therefore my heart is glad
and my whole being rejoices;
my body also rests securely.

¹⁰For you will not abandon me to Sheol;
you will not allow your faithful one to see decay.

¹¹You reveal the path of life to me;
in your presence is abundant joy;
at your right hand are eternal pleasures.

HYMN NCH #398 "Shadow and Substance"

SERMON

HYMN NCH #769

PRAYERS

HYMN NCH #35 "O Mighty God, When I Survey in Wonder"

BENEDICTION: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

SUNG BENEDICTION NCH #28 "For the Beauty of the Earth"

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One morning recently I was meditating and journaling, and a question came **to** me:

What is it that you want?

I considered my spiritual and emotional landscape – especially my internal responses to *how slowly* our move to Newton is progressing. And my answer to that question was simply one word: **Joy**.

That's when I knew the topic for this week's sermon, and began reflecting on what I've experienced of joy. Strangely, my first thought about joy was about - math. I took college level math last semester, and I've discovered a connection between joy and . . . persistence!

At first I couldn't believe **how long** it took me to complete some of the assignments, but I noticed this weird thing. I felt *really* happy when I finished the assignment – and the harder the assignment, the greater the happiness.

I'm glad I learned this, at age 58, because it came in handy when 15 year-old Sara and I went to the Science Center. She was in the Maker Space and had a block of wood. She drew a heart on it, and was going to cut that out with a handsaw.

My first temptation to cheat her of joy came when I realized she was drawing a heart. I wondered, *Should I tell her to draw something with straight edges?* I decided no, in favor of this being a learning experience. Besides, I've only used a handsaw to trim tree limbs, very skinny tree limbs. I'm no expert.

Then she started cutting. And it *was* hard. And it *was* slow. And *I* would have given up. But she kept at it! And about 15 minutes later there it was . . . a heart! Sara took off her safety goggles, and sweat dripped from her forehead. But she was grinning from ear to ear!

Jack Kornfield, a Buddhist author and clinical psychologist, writes

“The aim of spiritual life is to awaken a joyful freedom, a benevolent and compassionate heart in spite of everything

. . .

As gratitude grows it gives rise to joy. We experience the courage to rejoice in our own good fortune and in the good fortune of others. Joy is natural to an open heart. In it, we are not afraid of pleasure. We do not mistakenly believe it is disloyal to the suffering of the world to honor the happiness we have been given

. . .

We can be joyful for people we love, for moments of goodness . . . and for the breath within our breast. And as our joy grows we finally discover a happiness without cause.”

Joyful freedom and courage. It reminds me of a time I made a different choice. Last August I went to my first employee orientation at school. The program director met me outside the door with an offer. He said, “We’re going to start the meeting a few minutes late because some of us are going to look at the solar eclipse. I brought extra glasses. Would you like to join us?” My mind quickly calculated the odds. *Will I look dumb since I know nothing about the eclipse* competed with another thought *This sounds like fun!* “Will I look dumb” was the winner . . . and I went inside. As I sat in a cold room with the other abstainers I realized - this wasn’t who I wanted to be. Because it isn’t who I am. I *have* a sense of wonder, and it’s often brought out by experiencing nature.

When the weather is nice I have the pleasure of meditating on our deck. The other morning a red fox stood still beside the creek at the edge of our yard, for just a couple of minutes. I instantly felt grateful *and* felt lighter, as if he/she was a messenger from the Divine.

Speaking of messengers from the Divine, I know that *some of us* get joy from cats. And to that end I did bring the “Impressionist Cats” book which will be out on the table later for your viewing pleasure.

Mike Yaconelli in his book "Dangerous Wonder: The Adventure of Childlike Faith," wrote: "Children live in a world of dreams and imagination, a world of aliveness...There is a voice of wonder and amazement inside of all of us, but we grow to realize we can no longer hear it, and we live in silence. It isn't that God stopped speaking; it is that our lives became louder."

Fred Rogers knew the connection between wonder and joy, *and* how to reconnect us. About 20 years ago I was invited to attend a "Mr. Rogers Training for Daycare Providers." I couldn't wait to learn from curriculum that he helped develop. And boy was I surprised! There was no list of 7 tips for how to care for children. Instead, there were exercises, like this one: *Write about someone who took good care of you when you were little. What did you do together? How did you feel?* That tricky Mr. Rogers was helping us open our hearts.

I had the good fortune to be well cared for by my grandmother. After she was gone, I inherited some lilies of the valley from her yard. Each spring I've enjoyed happy memories and, God willing, I'll take the flowers to our new home.

Henri Nouwen wrote

"The beauty and preciousness of life is intimately linked with its fragility and mortality. We can experience that every day — when we take a flower in our hands, when we see a butterfly dance in the air, when we caress a little baby. Fragility and giftedness are both there, and our joy is connected with both."

As I consider joy, I realize I have some control over whether I experience it. For example, I can choose persistence when important things are difficult, and I can choose to put myself in places where joy is likely to happen: in nature, with children, and here!

I want to leave you with this experience from author Mark Coleman

Unlike our mind, our body and senses are always in the present. Being present in nature makes it much easier for us to inhabit our body and the realm of the senses. Unlike our temperature-controlled houses, the natural world entices our senses to wake up. When we step outdoors, our skin receptors enliven as we feel subtleties of temperature and breeze. Our hearing becomes sharper as we listen to nuances of birdsong, silence, and the rustling of leaves in a forest. Most of all, our eyes become captivated by the beauty, texture, and sheer diversity of color, shape, and form.

As we learn to inhabit our body outdoors, we have greater access to joy.

On a recent kayaking retreat in Mexico's Sea of Cortez, we were silently meditating in kayaks when a blue whale surfaced nearby. In that quietude, everyone remained perfectly still. The whale continued to feed and play for about half an hour. We witnessed up close its beautiful spout, elegant body, and magnificence and mastery in the water. It was a once-in-a-lifetime intimate encounter magnified by our stillness. Our inner quiet had allowed the rapture and sacredness of that experience to penetrate deeper. In a world where we are bombarded with so much negative news and environmental tragedy, it is essential that we learn to stay inspired, to keep our hearts buoyant and minds bright, so we are not pulled into hopelessness and inaction. Nature nourishes the soul, and the more present we can be to it, the deeper we can drink from her well and, refreshed, bring positive change into the world.