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Joy (Sermon Notes)
December 12, 2010
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I get them mixed up. Maybe they are all one: Joy, Gladness, Excitement, Happiness, Glee...

I know they are good and I know they are sought after by pretty much everyone to one degree or another.

Sometimes, maybe more often than not, they are sought after as antidotes to any number of things, external gratification –

rather than gifts in themselves, rather surprising and unpredictable gifts, I might add.

The marketing of these – hope, peace, joy, love – well, maybe it should be outlawed! ☺

I don't know, really, it's just that I think it is wrong to say – “Buy this, it will make you happy; or fill you or someone you love – with joy.

The predicament is not new. I remember talking about it and listening to it preached all about, even as a kid.

Commercialization of emotions for gain, financial or otherwise...creating need and then false promises of satisfying those needs...

All the “applications” or co-option of such God-given provisions of grace – well, It makes it sort of hard to differentiate between the joy of receiving something you've wanted – and the joy that is deep, solid, transcending, and part of everything in the universe – and then some (+1).

In other words Joy found in our relationship with God. Honestly, I'm not too good with the giddy over the top – joy that seems to absent itself from the reality of the world in which we live. Sometimes, I feel like that comes a little too close to denial.

No, I'm thinking about the joy that makes it possible to get through whatever comes our way. And the "our way" is important in this for me, in that sometimes my joy is a bit low, yet it always seems to grow in the company of others who are joyful, deep inside, so deep that it attached itself to everything about them – even in their sadness, when those times are at hand.

This came to mind as we continue with Isaiah's readings this week. Just listen to his words of encouragement from his joyful soul:

- the wilderness will rejoice and blossom (the Hebrew word means burst forth!)
- It will rejoice greatly and shout for joy
- All sorts of ailments will be gone
- Burning sand will become pools of glistening water
- The path, the highway, the Way of Holiness, "Whole-ly-ness" will protect and guide all, so much so that they don't even need to know what was going on, just be on the path...don't try to figure it out
- Gladness and joy will overtake us and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

The anticipated cause of all this, the one to come. Not a new tent or chariot, sandals, or fishing boat – the One God who is present and waited for at the same time...coming anew, in some way – soon they hoped. It was all about their faith and the close-up and personal relationship they had with God.

And Matthew says this in his writing this morning, when he reports Jesus' words: (paraphrased a bit)

Forget what you think you know. What do you see around you? Do you see all sorts of ailments gone; do you hear the Good News? Does it touch you?

And Jesus continues with asking them why they went into the desert. Was it to look at the weather, see fine garments, or a prophet. Someone who could touch you in ways you thirsted to be touched. In places of hope, peace, joy...

And yet, he might have added, you know so little compared to the so much more that awaits you...

How you cheat yourselves in your expectations...

Yes, you should be leaping for joy

It's not easy to always leap for Joy. Jesus didn't leap onto the cross. No, the sorrow and the pain and the disappointment were real; and so was the joy – greater than all these things.

It would seem to me that maybe, now and then, he even doubted it a bit. However, he had Isaiah's way of holiness, as well, to rely upon.

I have searched my heart to find these things and will continue to do so. They are not compartmentalized or sitting on some cognitive shelving. But I know them when they bolster me or touch me – through my own reflection or more often from something others do.

None of these need to be purchased or owned, for that to be true it would mean that a sunset could only produce joy if we were to somehow own the sun.

It is enough to “see” joy and wonder in the simplest of ways that are the most remarkable and sometimes it all happens with the most innocent of creatures...

It was joy that touched me when I received the following in an Email. May that Joy touch you. Enjoy.



Debby was brought a squirrel that had somehow fallen from a nest...and she took it in to nurse back to health.

When she did start caring for this smallest of creatures, much to her surprise she found herself with an unlikely nurse's aide: her pregnant Papillion, Mademoiselle Giselle.



Still, for safety's sake, she kept Finnegan in a cage in the days before Giselle was due to deliver her puppies. But Giselle didn't like that very much and as the story is told she twice dragged the squirrel's cage to the side of her bed.



With some trepidation, the family Finnegan in the bed with Giselle and the newly-born pups.



And although Giselle didn't allow Finnegan to nurse along with the pups, they all seemed to enjoy each others' company



Finnegan rides a puppy mosh pit of sorts, burrowing in for warmth after feeding, eventually working his way beneath his new litter mates.



Two days after giving birth, mama dog Giselle allowed Finnegan to nurse; family photos and a videotape show her encouraging him to suckle alongside her litter of five pups.

Now, Finnegan mostly uses a bottle, but still snuggles with his 'siblings' in a mosh pit of puppies, rolling atop their bodies, and sinking in deeply for a nap.

Finnegan and his new litter mates, five Papillion puppies, get along together as if they were meant to.



Finnegan naps after feeding.



Finnegan makes himself at home with his new litter mates, nuzzling nose-to-nose for a nap after feeding.

MORAL OF THE STORY:

Keep loving everyone, even the squirrely ones

Ahhh, the Joy!