

**Joy To The World**  
**Reflection/Sermon KVCC given Aug. 18, 2019**  
**by Martha Gallagher, lay worship leader**

**“THIS IS THE DAY THE LORD HAS MADE; LET US REJOICE AND BE GLAD IN IT”** Psalm 118:24

This well-known psalm, beautiful in its simplicity, is but one of many psalms that speak about joy, call for joy or rejoicing.

As a matter of fact, the words joy, joyful and rejoice are mentioned between at least 165 to 218 times in the Bible, depending on the version, indicating that it's rather an important word, concept and action.

We read it, we hear it, but believing it and living it - living joy - seem much easier said than done. How can we be joyful when each new day seems to bring with it new horrors, fresh tragedies, greater fear and deepening divides worldwide?

### **The Psalms and Joy**

It's pretty difficult not to notice the repeated call to joy and gladness throughout the Psalms, and the many different, good reasons for joy, and for calling other people to joy.

It's intriguing, this call for joy, because the Psalms are also filled with so many laments.

This seems to indicate that joy and sorrow live together, side-by-side.

The idea of using “Joy” as the focus of today's meditation came to me in a rather round-about way. I have been recently reading a book called “The Power of Decision” by Raymond Charles Barker, who was a leader and author in the Religious Science and New Thought Movement.

In the chapter entitled “Decide to be Happy” he talks about how some religious traditions imply that it's not quite decent to be happy.

As a matter of fact, they seem to imply quite strongly that unhappiness is a virtue.

He says at one point, “There is a great need for a well-know artist to paint a picture of Jesus smiling, and another one of him laughing. I am sure that he smiled and laughed often.

Great spiritual ideas are not born in gloomy minds. Gloomy, depressed minds are not the womb of creativity. They spawn negatives, not positives.

The mind of Jesus had to be a rejoicing one, for the truths that appeared by means of him are eternal verities.

They have made men and women happy, and are still doing so. They lift the spirits. They console the depressed. They heal the sick. They prosper those who can accept them. They make glad the heart.

Such truths came out of a rejoicing mind that knew It’s source and drew upon It.”

Wow - fascinating! But as fascinating as it all was, what I kept going back to was the idea of Jesus smiling - and laughing! “The mind of Jesus must have been a rejoicing one...” JOY!

As we read the Bible we know that Jesus went through many sorrows, trials and tribulations, but to then think of Jesus having a mind that rejoices - this illuminated Jesus Christ, God incarnate - “of the flesh” - as a real, complete “Deity in human form” to me.

## **WHAT IS JOY?**

Let’s take a step back for a moment and actually define the word “Joy”.

Webster’s dictionary defines Joy as "a condition or feeling of high pleasure or delight; happiness or gladness.”

To me, “joy” in the context of biblical teachings goes so much deeper than this definition.

And I wondered...

## **ARE JOY AND HAPPINESS THE SAME THING?**

Amazingly, much research has been done and there is much written about this!

Joy is something that lasts.

Happiness is something that is temporary.

Joy springs from within and is an internal experience.

Happiness is caused by external circumstances or experiences.

Joy brings with it a feeling of contentment and confidence which can take us through a storm in our life-journey.

Happiness is not present when we are in the midst of a storm; it just vanishes.

Joy is a conscious commitment to be happy, to have a sense of gratitude and contentment despite life's challenges.

Happiness is a blurred emotion.

Happiness tends to be externally triggered and is based on other people, things, places, thoughts and events.

Joy is more consistent and is cultivated internally. It comes when you make peace with who you are, why you are and how you are.

Joy is a lasting inward experience.

## **IN THE BIBLE**

We see that joy and sorrow often - usually - go hand in hand. We think we live in terrible times - but taking a look at so many of the stories in the Bible it is easy to see that there have been many terrible times; truly terrible times. When Jesus was born it was a terrible time - and his birth added to the terrible times.

So, how can we be filled with joy? Joy can feel so insubstantial; being joyful so shallow; rejoicing to be almost ludicrous; sinful.

These were the questions that kept running through my mind, even as I read Bible passage after Bible passage about joy. How? Joy? Really?

It hit me like a bolt of lightning the other night. I was here at the gathering on Tuesday evening discussing the Climate Crisis and Spirituality - a great evening. With all the questions, science, action called for and positivity displayed, I felt in the room a powerful mixture of struggling hope and overwhelming despair. Just as the meeting ended, it was as if a huge boulder came crashing in through the roof and smashed into the pew in front of me!

We had talked about everything except “the elephant in the room” - and what might actually be a big part of the answer! The ONE thing that made everything possible, one of the strongest underpinnings of Christianity, the element that gives JOY much of it’s strength and substance.

Not Love, although Love is what wraps this all together; what cradles it all and is at the heart.

I’m talking about FAITH.

How can we be joyful in the face of so much sorrow and difficulty?

Faith; faith lifts joy up.  
And Joy infuses Faith.

We’ll have to leave exploring FAITH more deeply for another time.

I came to see joy as many of the varied and colorful threads that weave together the fabric of Christian belief and living.

On my “Journey to Joy,” as I came to refer to my preparing for, researching materials and gathering inspirations for today, I discovered that there have been many people who have written and spoken on the subject of JOY in the Christian traditions - very effectively and eloquently.

Their insightful words continue to make me think deeply on the word “Joy” itself, the idea, the concept - and the Christian expression of Joy.

I’d like to share with you the words of Mary Luti, found in an online UCC Daily Devotional for Joy ([https://www.ucc.org/daily\\_devotional\\_for\\_joy](https://www.ucc.org/daily_devotional_for_joy)):

**“IT WAS ALL ABOUT JOY**

*I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. - John 15:11*

So it was all about joy.

It was for joy he was born, for joy he befriended and healed, for joy he offended the powers, for joy he said love one another and love the world even though you don't belong to it and it's never going to love you back. It was for joy he endured the terrible shame, for joy he was raised, for joy he said peace be with you and pardoned us everything, for joy he went to sit at God's right hand, for joy upon joy he will return, the first mercy and the last. It was so that his joy would be in us, and our joy would be complete.

And all this time you thought it was about duty, so you've been doing it. You thought it was about making an effort, so you've been making one. You thought it was about becoming a better person and making the world a better place, so you've slogged away. You thought it was about you, about what God wants you to do, about the difference you should be making, about getting the holy job done.

But it was always about joy. The joy of his company. The joy of his grace. The joy of his love for God. The joy of his justice. Even the hard joy of his suffering. It was about being branches of his vine, sheep of his flock, drinking from the living waters of his deep, deep well. It was about doing just and saving work with him, in him, and through him, not for him, like some boss, not to merit a star, and not until you drop.

No, it was for the joy we know when we know him. It was always about joy.

It still is.

### **Prayer**

Jesus, joy of our desiring, joy no circumstance can alter, be our joy forever.  
Amen.”