

Sermon 22.05.22

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John 16: 19-24

Since Jesus was aware that they wanted to question him, he said, "You're asking one another about my saying, 'in a short time you'll lose sight of me, but soon after that you'll see me again.' " The truth of the matter is, you'll weep and mourn while the world rejoices; you'll grieve for a time, but your grief will turn to joy. When a woman is in labor she cries out, because her time has come. When she has borne her baby she no longer remembers her pain, because of her joy that a child has been born into the world. In the same way, you are now grieving; but I will see you again and then you'll rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. On that day you'll no longer question me about anything. The truth of the matter is, if you ask Abba God for anything in my name, it will be given to you. Until now you haven't asked for anything in my name. Ask, and you will receive so that your joy will be complete.

Easter is a seven-week long season of joy, writes priest and NYT columnist Tish Harrison Warren.

A 7 week long season of joy...

that begins on Easter Sunday and stretches all the way to Pentecost 50 days later... In the liturgical calendar, it is the longest season of celebration and feasting.¹

We continue our journey through the Easter season, the kintsugi season - with the cup of joy.

Like our kintsugi bowl - Joy is complicated - complex... shards of life pieced together to make something new; maybe even beautiful.

Let's take a look at what Jesus offers to all who follow him.

You will have grief, but your pain, your grief, your sorrow, it will turn into joy (v 20). Jesus doesn't say - your grief and sorrow will be forgotten, or disappear. Rather it will *turn* into joy.

The good news of Easter does not erase the suffering of the cross, but it does transform it. Turn it into something different. Pain, sorrow and grief are a reality, but they will be turned to joy.²

Joy doesn't insist that we pretend things are better than they are.

It does not refuse to face grief or sorrow.

.. death is real, but there's something greater than death. Injustice is real, but it's not the end of the story. Suffering is real, but it cannot erase beauty.

¹ [Tish Harrison Warren article on Joy in NYT](#)

² from *Feasting on the Gospels, John, Volume 2*. Buz Wilcoxon, p 203-205

Joy says that suffering is not all there is, it can be found in the midst of suffering.

In her book “The Gravity of Joy”³ author and pastor Angela Gorrell writes -joy is the very being and presence of God ministering to us. *The very being and presence of God ministering to us.*

Joy isn't something we do, we can't choose the emotion joy. We can't make joy, like we make spaghetti, because joy is a gift.

In Greek, the word for grace and the word for joy are very similar to each other. What we see is that *joy is a gift – the inbreaking of the goodness of God in the midst of life's circumstances* – no matter what those circumstances look like.

For Noelle Nelson, November 8, 2018 was a typical southern CA day - beautiful, sunny, the Santa Ana winds blowing. A brush fire burning somewhere far away in Los Angeles country.

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At 5 pm, after work, Noelle⁴ headed out to her ballroom dancing class.

On her way home, she discovered 4 voice mails informing her of immediate orders to evacuate - She'd lived through 3 of these evacuations before - with nothing more than the smell of smoke welcoming her home. So she packed up her dogs, and with just the clothes on her back, she left.

This time - in 40 minutes, her home of 17 years, burned to the ground. Nothing was left, nothing. Even her cement driveway was burned to dust.
Now known as the Wolsey fire.

³ Gorrell, Angela Williams. 2021. *The Gravity of Joy*. Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company.

⁴ <https://www.audible.com/pd/Stories-of-Inspiring-Joy-Podcast/B08JJNLNH6>

Noelle says shock doesn't name her experience of the following weeks and months.

She didn't stop working, went to church, as always, continued going to her ballet and ballroom dancing classes. She didn't know what else to do, so she continued the regular routine.

It was through doing her 'anchors', the normal activities, as she calls them, that miracles came - shards of joy in the brokenness and loss.

Someone in her ballroom dancing class, whom she barely knew, offered her a rental house at a reduced rate...

Others she worked with, those from her church - they gave her office supplies, groceries, dog beds...

They just stepped up to help

She felt seen and connected in ways she hadn't recognized before.

Joy is the very being and presence of God ministering to us.

Our scripture goes on -

'In the same way, you are now grieving, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you' (v 22).

It's not just the case that after Jesus is raised, the disciples will see him again, but also that *he* will see them. Jesus will see them, fully, and they will have joy. *He will see us.* Jesus sees us as we are truly meant to be seen, and no one can take this joy away.

How we long to be seen - in our imperfections and still welcomed in.

Part of the loss of *every thing* in Noelle's home from the fire included her medications and refills.

After multiple calls to insurance companies and doctors offices she got a new refill approved. She went to the local pharmacy, arguing with the

pharmacist who needled her about it not being time for yet for her refill, reluctant to fill the prescription.

Noelle was tired, tired of explaining - in near tears she blurted out 'look, my house burned down with everything in it and I don't have my medication'. She got her perscription, paid, and turned to go.

A woman who was standing in line stopped her and said - I couldn't help overhearing what you said. ' I'm so sorry, can I do anything, can I help, can I buy you something, anything here in the store?' Noelle, tired, overwhelmed was blown away by this gesture of kindness - and mumbled a no, thanks.

She stumbled out to her car and, driving down a dark unfamiliar road to her rental home, she wept. Bawled. I have nothing, and yet I have everything, she realized. I have my beloved dogs, a safe place to stay, my church, my work, and most surprisingly of all, I have perfect strangers who love me.

She realized the goodness of those she knew, and those who showed up with acts of kindness out of the blue.

Pain, sorrow and grief are a reality, but they will be turned to joy. Jesus told his closest companions: I will see you again...and no one will take your joy from you. Noelle knew something of being seen, and finding joy in those connections.

In our scripture...

Jesus shares the promise of eventual joy - a joy that won't be taken away - and then charges them to be about the work of prayer. "Ask" he says, 'and you will receive' (v 24), so long as the asking is done 'in my name'. In Greek - *en to onomati mou*.

This command to ask - 'in my name' - it's confusing. It's been used like a formula. If you don't end your prayers in the right way - in Jesus' name - you're not going to get what you ask for.

But when the phrase is considered within the literary context of all that comes before, we may see a more nuanced meaning.

"Ask" he says, 'and you will receive' (v 24) - *en to onomati mou*. Jesus speaks these words as he nears the cross.

Jesus' ministry is one that is soon to be characterized by intense suffering for himself and eventually his disciples.

In this context, the reference to asking 'in my name' cannot be separated from participation in Jesus' suffering AND his life giving pattern of ministry.

New Testament scholar Dale Bruner suggests that one could translate 'in my name' as 'in my mission'.

Listen to it with those words -

"I tell you, if you ask anything of Abba God *in my mission*, it will be given to you... ask and you will receive'.⁵

Might this phrase be a means of directing our minds, our hearts and our lives to the pattern of Jesus' own ministry, 'so that our joy may be complete'?

Even in the midst of suffering, our own or others, we can feel the complexity of joy - in connection with others, in seeing beauty, even in broken places.

Noelle's tells of a moment -

One Sunday evening, at the end of choir practice at church, as she was talking about the fire, the guitar player piped up saying 'I don't get what the big deal is, it's just stuff'. She'd heard it before, usually just burying

⁵ from *Feasting on the Gospels, John, Volume 2*. Buz Wilcoxon, p 203-205

her feelings, but this time she yelled ‘no, it’s not just stuff! It’s my mother’s portrait, it’s the first picture of my baby sister, it’s the lace shawl my grandmother gave me’. Oh, the guitarist answered, ‘you lost your story’.

He got it right. She’d lost her story, as represented through the pictures, mementos, heirlooms of her 71 years. It wasn’t about t-shirts and tea cups, stuff is easily replaced. Story, not so easily. The old was irretrievably gone.

She had to create a new story. It meant accepting all the loss - grieving the possessions she’d loved - it wasn’t just stuff. It took her a full 2 months to throw away the garage opened to her non-existent Malibu garage. It took another 4 months for her to throw away the house keys. She knew how irrational it was to hold onto those things, but it was hard.

What allowed her to create a new story were the anchors, the places of meaning and purpose - the places she found joy - meaningful work, deeply rooted connections with friends, her church community.

That’s where joy is found; where new stories are created. She learned she wasn’t alone. That she was surrounded by more love than she ever dreamed of.

Joy is both a gift and a practice.
It is a muscle we can strengthen with exercise.

We can be postured for joy – live with open hands; look for it - open those little gifts, the inbreaking of the goodness of God in the midst of life’s circumstances.

Joy says: I can help you to know, even in the midst of your sorrow, your grief, your lament, that God meets you here, loves you here.

May it be so. Amen. (Glue the final parts of kintsugi together.)