

INDICATIVE JOY  
[written in oral form]

Luke 3:7-18; Philippians 4:4-7  
Advent 3, Year C

December 16, 2018  
Gordon Allaby

Joy is the traditional theme for the third Sunday of Advent.

Joy is very different from happiness.

Happiness is a personal sensation when something desirable comes to us. This could be a gift, an achievement or award. It could be food, a special event or a fun social occasion.

The lack of necessary money can make us unhappy; however, Money doesn't bring happiness, but a raise does.

With happiness, the flow is to us personally. Happiness results when we receive a desirable thing,....Yet happiness is ephemeral. It doesn't last, so we want more. We want something to fire up the dopamine production.

It feels good,.....briefly,.....and it is the impetus for consumerism and addictions. Needless to say, the fetish for happiness in our culture is selfish and can be destructive.

~~~~~

Joy is very different, and more lasting.

With Joy, a person is IN the outward flow-- IN / a part of the outward movement. It is not about self. It is not selfish, and therefore not subjective to lust.

Joy is transcendent.

~~~~~

Deep down, we understand the limitations of happiness, and we long for something deeper / something more meaningful.

In our spiritual thoughts,.....we comprehend and yearn for joy.

From the Luke text:

John the Baptist is preaching to discontented people who are likely seeking redemption and joy. Yet, they want it to come to them. They want to receive it. So, John dismisses them as a "brood of vipers." This is worse than being the symbolic snake that seeks to disrupt the good order of the universe. They are that, and full of poison.

They are somewhat like those who want to reduce carbon emissions, as long as there isn't a cost to them / as long as it doesn't alter their standard of living. It just won't happen that way.

John denounces them for not bearing fruit worthy of repentance / of not showing evidence of letting go.

They asked, "What shall we do?" .... What is the cost?

~~~~~

The Bible is amazing..... It's amazing because it changes.

This section did not exist until I became a Mennonite.

Honest, I don't recall ever reading this part when I was a Baptist.

I knew John the Baptist called people to repent, but in this pericope, John is telling the people to do social justice.

He said, if you have two coats, then give one to those who have none.

If we have more than we need to survive then we are to give it away, and this includes, food, money and power. He exhorted them to bring balance / to help those in need.... and to be content and not greedy.

And, notice the outward flow... away from self.

John's message was more complex and profound than I once thought.

Here is an example for why I called this a Mennonite perspective.

A few years ago, some Mennonite friends, who had just returned from MWC meetings in India said they road 3rd class on the trains.

I had heard about the condition of Indian trains, and I asked, "Why did you ride third class." They answered, "Because there wasn't a forth class." We affirm humility and equality.

~~~~~

We don't always practice social justice as we should, but we do value it; we do try to live it, and it's part of our theology.

~~~~~

We affirm that God greatly loves the poor and weak, and that God demands we do what we can to empower them.

This means we the affluent must do more than token assistance. We must also release our control of power and fortune in order to bring equity. And notice again, there is an outward flow to this.

This was what John taught. It was the way of Jesus, and I'm pretty sure the passion of God.

God / Love is graciously giving and reaching out. It is the nature of love, and God's way.

When we are in the outward flow, we will discover joy.

~~~~~

I don't think there is much joy at the Mexican border,.....but there is opportunity for joy. Rectifying the terrible land injustices in Central America would bring joy. The same is true when generously responding to the millions of African refugees.

We Canadians dare not be smug either. There is a growing resistance to our openness to receiving refugees.

~~~~~

Greed, hoarding and self protection are actions indicative of an inward flow / of selfishness. And, that inward pull is actually taking resources from the poor and weak, keeping them powerless and helpless.

To be sure, there is no joy in that.

~~~~~

Yet, we long for joy.

~~~~~

The Philippians passage encourages us to be in joy,... and not to worry about anything. The second chapter presents how that is done.

It is found in imitating Christ.

Listen to verse four:

"Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others." There is an outpouring / an outward flow to that.

John the Baptist gave some examples of that outward movement.

So, we can conclude that if we want joy, then we must give to others.

Yet, this is not easy. It's not easy to let go / to release ourselves.

Moreover, before we start calculating, "HOW much Joy can I afford..... How much can I spare or give..... How many refugees do we need to welcome?"

**We must realize that We Can NOT buy Joy.**

It's not like happiness. We can not buy or claim joy.

AND, .....acquiring joy is Not about you and me.  
We can't experience joy on our own

Joy is discovered with God's Spirit and love.

It's being IN the divine compassionate justice.  
....Being IN and With that outward flow.....

Joy requires Love.....and love enables us to change directions / to give.  
And, as John the Baptists reminded all,..... surrender and repentance is likely apart of the process.....to love.

~~~~~

When Leslie and I were contemplating having a child, I confess that I wasn't thrilled with the prospect. I was willing, but not thrilled.

I would recite all the changes it would mean.  
It meant giving up a lot of time, freedom.....and Money!  
A Child demands a lot of giving!

Yet, Leslie's passion and vision shifted my concern away from myself .... to her. The outward flow was beginning.

~~~~~

Once Katherine was born,.....I discovered that I underestimated all the changes required.  
BUT, she did NOT cost me a thing.

Loss or cost was never, never, never an issue..... because I knew her and loved her.  
Moreover, there was joy.....and it continues.  
We understand this about family / about those we love.

~~~~~

There are nameless people in need who we do Not know or love, and some have travelled a very long way to be received.

I wonder,.....what does it take to love.... to love them?  
What does it take to love strangers like we love family?  
What does it take for us to know God loves them as much or more than us?

~~~~~

I think the absence of JOY is very revealing.

The absence may be because we need to caress our grief and sorrow.

But if that is not the case, then I think the absence of joy means we are missing God's Spirit within us and with us. We are not in/ with the outward flow of Love. We have censored love.  
And, God is love.

Perhaps, John the Baptist was right: maybe we must let go of self to be with God.....to be in Joy.

What does repentance mean these days for you and me?

Could it mean loving social justice and parity?

Could it mean loving the environment / God's creation?