

070112 – The Fruit of Joy – The Spirit of Life
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What I want to say: *We are joyful when we are perceiving clearly God's joy in Creation and in creating. The Holy Spirit provides the perception and clarity needed to see God in Creation.*

What I want people to leave with: *A sense of the Holy Spirit's work in Creation and that Joy is a state of being manifested and created by the Holy Spirit.*

I am not a connoisseur of joy.

I don't really consider myself a joyful person.

I worry about it.

Joy seems like an important part of our faith in Jesus Christ and God
and my inability to experience it is a concern.

Sometimes, when I am concerned about my lack of joy,

I begin to look for it in the world around me

and then I begin to see what my difficulty is.

Self-help books are out there with smiling faces

and self-created personas which are clearly faking 'joy' until they have joy.

They promise health, wealth and constant non-worry.

I used to work for someone in a private health-care clinic.

He was into all kinds of strange things.

He would practice smiling in front of a mirror so his patients would see him as a joyful person.

This is what he told me.

He wanted his employees to be the same way

and to me, the whole exercise of faking joy felt like taking a bath with my
socks on.

It didn't fit.

But I came to an understanding, which fortunately was confirmed for me in reading some other Christian writers.

My understanding was quite simple, really:

most of the people I was listening to about joy had made a fundamental confusion.

They confused happiness with joy.

They confused an emotion with a state of being.

We can fake emotions.

We can make ourselves feel things when we don't actually feel them.

We can try to make others feel things we do not feel but wish we did feel.

But joy isn't a feeling.

It is a state of being which may or may not cause one to feel certain things,
one of those feelings being happiness.

As I reflect on moments when I can say I was aware of joy, they are not moments of great feeling.

Instead, they are events of profound meaning and depth.

They are experiences which transcend feelings.

I hope some of you have a quiver of moments of joy,

a pocketful of touchstones which allow you to be aware of joy.

Some of mine are the truly remarkable –

being there for the birth of Rhiannon would be an example.

Others are more mundane –

leading worship in a house after snowmobiling for two hours in -20 below weather, feeling the warmth of the wood-burning stove, singing hymns with no instruments.

Those moments are like a window opening on a deeper reality, something far greater than myself. They are reminders of my complete dependence on God and God alone for my life and my being.

The Holy Spirit is, according to many confessions and creeds, the one who is responsible for opening this window onto deeper reality.

It is the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes and lets us see truth, see God, in God's work.

We have at least three avenues of perceiving God's work by way of the Holy Spirit:
the testimony of Scripture,
the life and revelation of Jesus Christ
and in Creation itself.

Today I want to focus on Creation as the avenue by which the Holy Spirit opens our vision and being to God's presence and joy.

My hope is to show you

we are joyful when we perceiving clearly God's joy in Creation and in creating.

And we can only perceive clearly if we are aware of the foundations of our ability to perceive, which means knowing who is the source of all life.

It is rather a circular argument –

we are joyful when we are perceiving God's joy in creating,
and it is in joy that God has created us.

This knowledge we get from the Holy Spirit.

Joy is intimately tied to being alive.

We know joy because we can become aware of God's joy,
and this is only possible because we have life.

But what does it mean to 'have life'?

Is it the ability to exchange carbon dioxide for oxygen?

Is it the capacity to be conscious and aware?

Is it the heart beating, the leaves blossoming and the flowers blooming?

When we acknowledge we are spiritual beings, we see these physical manifestations are merely results, not causes, of life.

Breathing is a result of the presence of life.

Consciousness and awareness are the result of life.

The cause of life is clearly expressed in Genesis 2:7:

The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.

We have life because God has breathed his Spirit into us.

We have life because the Holy Spirit gives us life.

We have life because we know God gives us life.

This is why Jesus says,

I am the way, the truth and the life.

God, in God's complete being –

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
is the sole source of life, and therefore truth.

In Psalm 104, it says

I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will rejoice in the Lord.

Our joy is in what the Lord has provided,

and our being is intimately bound up in the joy God has taken in God's creation.

Last week, we spoke of God's love and how we share in the eternal relationship between God, Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Today, we go one step further.

To have life, to be a participant in the eternal life Christ has made for us in the house of the Lord, means to share in the joy the Lord has for all of his Creation.

It means we share in the joyful work of God's good things of this life.

If we do indeed share in the joy God takes in creation and in the continuing creation done through the Holy Spirit in the world and in our lives, we need to be clear about what joy is and what joy is not.

Joy is a state of being.

Joy is not a feeling.

Joy is a state of being which may engender feelings of happiness and pleasure,
but we need to be clear with ourselves that happiness is transitory.

It is fleeting.

In fact, happiness is often a detour on the way to joy.

And it is right there where the confusion takes place.

We swap out eternal joy – our participation in God's joyful creation –
for ephemeral, material happiness, and then call one the other.

Joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit and the awareness of the gift is conditional on our
understanding that our life is wholly dependent on God.

Our Psalm says,

These all look to you, to them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.

With these verses, we begin to see joy is not separate from the events and living and dying of life itself.

Part of my problem with my occasional search for joy in the world was this lack of acknowledgment of the suffering and pain of daily life.

My health practitioner friend wanted, it seemed to me,
to overcome suffering and pain by...

I don't know...changing his mind about it and somehow that might, in his personal redefinition, make the pain and suffering of others something other than what it was.

The constant search for earthly happiness seeks to separate the feeling of happiness from the experience of pain and suffering.

This troubles me greatly.

But, the Christian faith reaches deep into human experience and rather than placing us into the present moment, it instead extends us into a relationship with all who have gone before us, all who are with us and all who will be.

It makes promises to us, the fruits of which are made known to us by the Holy Spirit, in such a way that those who have gone before us now share in the joy of the Lord.

"Go into the joy of your Lord, good and faithful servant", Jesus in Matthew 25 tells us.
The suffering of those who have died and those who are yet to live
has not been in vain.

And at the same time, we know future suffering is finally for the greater glory of God.

Paul says, "*With all our affliction, we are overjoyed*" (2 Cor 7:9).

Suffering cannot exist without joy, and joy can only be truly understood by way of suffering.

John 16:20 *Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.*

I am not saying seek out suffering,

but don't avoid it for the sake of confusing joy with happiness.

But when we acknowledge God as the source and foundation of our life,
we no longer need to make those kind of psychological and mental moves.

Joy is not separate from suffering.

I would suggest that the joy of God must be joined with suffering,
for the greatest work of God is the suffering of Christ on the Cross for us.

In the great reversal and transference which occurs
in the deep places of the Holy Spirit,
it is only through the suffering of Christ that we can truly know the depth and
nature of God's joy in us and in his creation.

For we are the carriers of the breath of God.

We are the creatures who have been breathed into life by the Spirit of God.

And we are the creatures who have been restored into relationship and
dignity with God by Jesus Christ.

The work of the Holy Spirit is as one who reveals.

She reveals to us the truths of Scripture.

She reveals to us the benefits and gifts of Jesus Christ's work upon the Cross.

And she reveals to us the joy of God in Creation.

May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works, who looks upon the earth and it
trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke!

God does indeed rejoice in his works and we are joyful when the Holy Spirit directs us
and guides us to perceive clearly God's presence and joy in the creation He has made.

Amen.