

Joy Factor - Week 2

Welcome to the second week of our new series for a New Year. We began by simply reflecting on the very idea of a *happy* new year. Whatever else we want from 2018, we want it to be happy. We are on a happiness quest. But happiness actually can refer to a vast collection of human experiences that involved different levels of well-being.

We said, basically they fall into three categories or levels. The first level takes place in your body, with your senses. It comes from things that appeal to our senses that make us feel good. The next level of well-being takes place in your mind. This well-being also includes a range of experiences like contentment, excitement, gratitude. Beyond a feeling, this is a thought. We said pleasure and happiness are thoughts and feelings and they're circumstantial and they are always temporary. They are also potentially preparatory for more, for the more that God wants us to have.

There is an experience you can experience in the deepest part of you - that is you, that is your soul. Your soul is the deepest part of you and the experience of wellbeing in your soul is **called...joy.**

Joy is the experience of well-being at the deepest part of you that is you,

- It is not circumstantial; it is entirely independent of circumstances.
- It is not temporary it is long lasting, even permanent

There is one other incredibly important difference between pleasure and happiness as distinct from joy. We can acquire pleasure and happiness for ourselves. And many people spend a lot of their time and all of their money doing exactly that.

Joy is different.

We said, Joy is not something you can buy or manufacture or make, nor is it something that someone else - can even ever give you. Ultimately it is a gift of God, It is a fruit, a gift of the Spirit, that is given to us. When you live your life with joy it changes and transforms your life, at least gradually and eventually it does, and works in all your relationships. And if you are a Christian, a follower of Christ, joy is absolutely essential to being a disciple or student of Christ.

We also said that if you want joy we've got to pursue it, you've got to be on the lookout for it. It's about positioning yourself to be able to receive it, to be on the lookout for it, to follow it. We spoke about the number one obstacle to joy in our life and discovering it - is us. We work for things that don't satisfy, and in the process we keep joy at bay. Sometimes there are things that actually kill any possibility of joy in our lives, perhaps even good things that crowd out the best things. Some of our joy killers are sins that we nourish and work to hold onto.

This week we want to look at what you can start doing to receive the gift of joy. To help us, we are going to look at a passage from the *Gospel* of John, one of the four gospels which was written by the *apostle* John. He writes,

*John was standing with two of his disciples
and he watched Jesus walk by, he said,
"Behold, the Lamb of God."
John 1.29*

This verse is not talking about John the *apostle*, but John the *Baptist*, who figures prominently in the beginning of all four Gospels, for a couple of different reasons. Everyone knew who he was, everyone was talking about him, huge crowds went out to hear him preach in the desert. Besides the crowds who came out to see him for entertainment or curiosity John, like any teacher of the day, had his devoted disciples. These were people who made a commitment to him, **to learn from him**. There were no schools or universities, if you wanted to learn the Scripture and the Law you picked a rabbi and followed him around.

There was a saying at that time,

May you walk so closely to your rabbi that his dust covers you.

So John the Apostle tells us that John the Baptist one day is standing out in the desert, where crowds of people have come to see him, Jesus walks by and so John turns to two of his disciples, one of whom was actually John the Apostle and the other was a man named Andrew and he says,

*Behold the Lamb of God.
John 1.35*

The *Lamb of God* is a phrase that has layers of deep, rich meaning for pious Jews. Before the Jewish people escaped from the slavery of Egypt God required a sacrificial offering in the form of a sacrificed lamb...something of value that they gave up, as an offering, as worship.

Subsequently, such offerings became a ritual feature of Temple worship in Jerusalem.

The lambs of God were raised in the fields between Bethlehem and Jerusalem and then sold in the Temple courts, worshipers would buy a lamb and offer it to the priest of the Temple for slaughter again, as a form of sacrifice or worship.

And it was a famous prophet, named Isaiah who forecast that one day a Messiah or savior would come and save the people from their oppression and sin, serving himself as the lamb for sacrifice before God. A sacrifice provided by God himself. This is why before communion we say about the bread that has become the real and full presence of Christ, *“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* We are beholding the Lamb of God who takes away our sin.

When John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God it was a singular and stunning thing to say, and reveals the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy and the reality of the coming crucifixion. He’s saying there is the long awaited savior. This is his disciples clue that Jesus really is somebody, a leader worth following.

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.

John 1. 37

So John and Andrew, who had been John’s disciples, that day no questions asked become Jesus’ disciples by simply following him. Perhaps sensing their presence

Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked:

“What are you looking for?”

John 2.38

What do you want out of life? It’s a great question. But the disciples don’t really have a great response. Instead they say,

Rabbi, where are you staying?

John 2.38

The question is their way of asking, “Can we like hang out with you?” And Jesus says,

Come and see.

John 1.39

Which is his basic invitation throughout the gospel.

Come and see.

John 1.39

So they went and saw where Jesus was staying and they stayed with him that day.

It was about four in the afternoon.

John 1.39

So John tells us that they saw where Jesus was staying and they hung out with him and then he adds this detail,

It was about four in the afternoon.

John 1.39

Why is that in there? Why does that matter what time it was? Nothing in the Gospels is there accidentally and everything is written for a purpose. John the Apostle includes the seemingly insignificant detail that it was 4 in the afternoon because that's the day and time when my life changed.

I'll never forget that moment. The Gospel goes on,

*Andrew the brother of Simon Peter,
was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus.*

He first found his brother Simon and told him,

"We have found the Messiah which is translated Christ."

John 1.40-42

So Andrew like John has been changed through spending this time with Jesus. Andrew is unable to contain his joy runs and tells his brother Simon Peter the news that he has found the Messiah and brings his brother to Jesus.

My grandmother used to say you can bear your burdens alone but you must share your joy and share in others joy. Joy must be shared and that's what we see the apostles Andrew and John doing. They share their joy of meeting the person of Jesus Christ with others.

One of the things that most turns people off when it comes to church and church world (which is what we have come to call all religion) is the grumpiness that characterizes many congregations and many Christians. Have you ever had the experience when you visited a church and the ushers were abrupt and the members were unfriendly? Unhappy Christians are the most compelling case against Christ, maybe its all the religious rule keeping that makes them so grumpy and unpleasant. But way beyond religious rule keeping is the invitation to a relationship with Christ, which is an invitation to the experience of joy.

Which all and always begins:

Come and see.

John 1.39

What we are talking about is a lifestyle change. Joy is a change in lifestyles. So I have three different challenges today and I want you to choose the one that applies to you. If this is your first time in church today, or the first time in a long time, if you are just checking us out, we're just glad you're here and hope you'll join us again next week. For those of you who are more or less regulars when it comes to church but just do it out of guilt or obligation or habit, or "for the kids" but you've never really put the stake in the ground and said, "*I'm follower of Jesus Christ.*"

Your challenge would be to go home and find a private place, because otherwise people will think you're weird, and go there and close the door, maybe get on your knees and say, "Jesus, I want to follow you. I want a personal relationship with you. I want joy and I believe you are the source of it."

And then repeat that daily, a daily quiet time.

The third challenge is for many of you today who are church goers and Christ-followers. While your faith is personal, it isn't meant to be private. As long as you keep it to yourself, you are limiting your experience, it is never going to feel like a living relationship. To make that happen we have to share our faith. Friends in faith will help us go further faster, and wake up to the reality of our relationship with Christ.

Our Small Groups in the parish are about that: sharing our faith and growing in our relationship with Christ. At the same time they provide the opportunity for care and support. You might say that Small Groups are where our great big church gets up close and personal and we want all our parishioners to have that kind of help and support. If you don't have a small group or you need a new group we have Lent coming up.

Last Lent was fantastic with people signing up for Small Group. Stayed tuned because we will be having sign-ups for Lenten small groups in a couple of weeks. So, if you want to learn more about small groups watch the website, the bulletin and our weekly emails for more information

Jesus is the joy of our desire. He speaks to us and leads us to joy in our souls. Take the step you need to take this week to follow him more closely.

The world can offer us countless pleasures and even genuine happiness. But it cannot offer even a single moment of joy.

Only God can do that. On the other hand, once we have it, neither can the world ever take it away.