

Joy Factor – Week 3

Welcome to the third and final week of our first series for the New Year, which comes to a close this weekend. We began by simply reflecting on the very idea of a *happy* new year. Whatever else we want from 2015, we want it to make us happy. We are on a happiness quest. We just want to get to the end of the day or week, or the month or the year you and be able to say it was a happy time. We often hear people saying: *I just want to be happy*. But happiness actually can refer to a vast collection of very different kinds of human experiences that involved different levels of well-being.

Basically they fall into three broad categories or levels. The first level takes place in your body, with your senses. This is what we call pleasure. 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, felicity, gratitude. Beyond a feeling, this is a thought. God created pleasure and happiness and when we are enjoying them in appropriate ways in our lives, it pleases him. It's just that their not the goal and they're not the destination either. It's not ultimately or only what he wants for us. He wants more.

- You experience pleasure with your senses. And then it passes. The experience ends.
- You experience happiness with your thoughts, and in your mind. And then it passes. The experience ends.

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.

We talked about that Your soul is the deepest part of you and the experience of well-being 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

We said that the difference between pleasure and happiness as distinct from joy was that we can acquire pleasure and happiness for ourselves. A huge part of our culture is only all about the people acquiring pleasure and happiness for themselves. Which is fine. But joy is different. 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, a sure and certain sign of the presence and power of God. It is a fruit of the Spirit, a gift of the Spirit, that is given to us.

We said that when you live your life with joy, gratefully receiving and living in this gift, 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 of Christ. God wants to use you to bring others to him and your joy is your most compelling case for others to follow Christ.

Just as we said conversely, grumpy Christians and congregations are the number one reason un-churched people say they don't want to go to church. Your joy is your most compelling case for Christ. But 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.

Last week we talked about what we need to start doing. Ultimately what we need to do is to start following Jesus and continue following Jesus. Jesus is the source of our joy and will lead us to joy. If you are not a follower of Jesus, I encouraged you to put a stake in the ground and declare it. For others we encouraged you to get into a small group because while faith is personal, it isn't private. As long as you keep it to yourself, you are limiting your experience, it is never going to feel like a living relationship, it's never going to feel like a life-style. 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 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. We like to 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.

Think about joining a small group for Lent. Lenten small group launch will begin on February 3rd and 4th and February 10th and 11th. Watch for the sign ups in the bulletin, weekly emails, and at mass. Be on the lookout for the Lenten sign up for our Small Group Launch. You can learn more about our Small Group Program and how you can get into a group by.....

In wrapping up today, I want to send you away with three words that you can use so that you find joy on a daily basis. These three little words were at the heart of Jesus' message and preaching and teaching. And they are crucial if we are to receive and enjoy the gift of joy. We find these three words in the Gospel of Mark.

The passage we're looking at begins like this:

*After John had been arrested,
Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God.
"This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand."*

Mark 1.14-15

So John the Baptist, who we talked a little bit about last week, was the colossal figure in the gospels, who had prepared the way for Jesus is arrested because he ran afoul of the king, Herod. John's arrest and the effective end of his ministry for Jesus becomes a clear signal that it is now time for him to step up and begin his public ministry, preaching and teaching. John had finished his job of preparation, and now Jesus is to get to work. From the beginning - Jesus' message is unexpected: this is a different time, God is doing something different, a turning point in all of human history.

"The kingdom of God is at hand."

Mark 1.15

The kingdom of God is an expression used extensively by Jesus throughout his preaching. He never actually explains it, he demonstrates it instead. **That's because it's not a place, it's a presence and a power.** The presence and power of Christ and the movement he was launching. That's the movement that we're a part of. That's what this is all about. God invites us in right now to enter his kingdom. While our faith does point to a future heaven and future fulfillment, life and rewards in a time to come, the invitation of Jesus is to enter into that kingdom right now, **because it's not a place, it's a presence and a power.** - the presence and power of Christ in our world. So the kingdom of God has come. God is up to something amazing Jesus says. But we have a part to play if we are to enter and experience the joy of the kingdom. So therefore what?

What do we have to do to experience this kingdom?

He says,

Repent

Mark 1.15

Repent is not a word we like to hear or use. It often has a negative connotation in our minds. Maybe you think of strange scary looking people holding signs that read *"Jesus is coming, turn or burn,"* hell fire and brimstone preachers, prophets of doom and gloom. You hear a word like that and are reminded of why you don't like to go to church to begin with, because its all negative and designed to make people feel bad about themselves, or guilty.

In fact, despite its negative association, - the word repent is a translation of a Greek phrase in the New Testament which is quite positive, far from a threat, **its actually an invitation.**

It literally says:

Why not change your mind!

Mark 1.15

It's an invitation. And the invitation is to think differently. What is he asking us to think differently about?

Repent and believe in the gospel

Mark 1.15

Gospel is also the translation of another Greek phrase, *good news*. So another way of saying this is:

Why not change your mind about the good news?

Mark 1.15

The rest of Jesus preaching and teaching are an unfolding of the depth and breadth of that God news.

- **Good news that there is a God in heaven who loves you.**
- **Good news that he sent his Son to die for you.**
- **Good news that he gave you his Spirit to remain with you and direct your steps when you'll let him**
- **Good news that no matter how many times you fall and fail God, he will never ever give up on you.**
- **Good news that he is not finished with you yet, he is working with you to make you into the person he had in mind when he created you.**
- **Good news that ultimately light triumphs over darkness, life triumphs over death, and that ultimately good conquers evil.**
- **Good news that life, despite all its challenges and difficulties really can be lived with joy.**

Why not change your mind about that? Belief starts in the mind. But it doesn't end there. Action and obedience ultimately follow our belief, if our belief is authentic and sincere. To change our mind about the Good News means ultimately changing our behaviors, living our lives based on Jesus' directions and teachings for living.

There is a change in thinking that when made leads to a change in behavior, which if followed in a disciplined manner, will lead to a change in heart, **which is joy**. Here's the truth. Today is the day the Lord has made, and he invites us to rejoice and be glad in it. Now is the appointed time for us to experience the joy God has to offer. This is our chance and our opportunity. Honestly ask yourself: are you living in joy today? If I am completely honest with myself, I would have to admit that I have lived much of my life apart from joy:

I've lived it in anxiety and worry, in fear and frustration, in anger, in sin and selfishness, but not always in joy.

And a lot of people are like I was. They live their lives in many things but not joy.

Here's the truth. Today is the day the Lord has made, and he invites you to rejoice and be glad in it. Today is the day, now is the appointed time for you to experience the joy God has to offer. Today is the day, now is the appointed time this is your chance and opportunity. If you're finding joy elusive, ask yourself what is it exactly that you believe. Because whatever it is, you

really can change your mind. Change your mind, change your behavior and allow your heart to then change too. God offers us infinite joy and grace, free of charge and it starts now.

Our job is not to manufacture joy, we can't anyway. It's to position ourselves to receive it by removing the obstacles we place in the way. Remember, 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.