

2018 12 16 – Stories of Joy

Philippians 4:4-7

This week I found on the Internet a blog written by a woman who has the audacity to call her website “Daily Practice of Joy.” I started reading her posts and was pleased to discover that her writing was honest and heart-felt. She described not only the moments of joy in her life but also the times when joy was hard or nearly impossible to find. I’m going to share some her story with you today. Her name is Victoria Price and she lives in the United States. Here’s her first story from a blog she called, “Where the Rubber Meets the Road”:

I am writing this blog on an airplane where, for the first time in what feels like months, I have two hours ahead of me where I can't DO. . .and in that quiet, I am FEELING. . .so so so many things that I have been keeping myself too busy to feel.

My flight was delayed twice. A late arrival. Then a flight attendant had to be taken off by EMTs because she didn't feel well. Although the majority of the passengers took the delay in stride -- or even expressed concern for the flight attendant's health -- the lady directly in front of me bitched and moaned for fifteen straight minutes. Which is exactly what I was doing last night for much longer during three phone calls to Apple technicians. Which sent me into a spiral of self-loathing – and woke me up this morning with a determination to make some serious changes in the way I am moving through my daily life.

Listening to that lady was a gift -- an opportunity to see myself mirrored back in testy Technicolor . . . and be grateful that I had moved past my unpleasant behavior of the night before and, at least on the exterior, I was calm. But inside, I feel like someone has plugged me in to some wattage that is waaaaaay higher than what I need, so all I do is buzz and jangle and fritz. And I desperately need that to stop.

But how? This is the first way the rubber needs to meet the road of my life! I need to get back to center by revisiting the choices that have gotten me to this moment. Because those choices were not made by my busy little head, were they? No, of course not! But what happens so often is that, the moment Spirit shines a light or Love opens my heart or Mind sends an idea, I say, "Awesome! Thank You so much. I'll take it from here." And then I get busy. No, let me rewrite that: I get BUSY! I excel at BUSY. I am a BUSYness expert. I get BUSY doing and doing and doing and doing. And pretty soon I am jangling so loud that whatever divine inspiration started my journey is a distant dusty memory.

<http://www.dailypracticeofjoy.com/archive/2016/5/14/where-the-rubber-meets-the-road>

Victoria's story goes on, but I'm going to stop here because this is where the tears started to flow for me as I was reading her blog. I was hooked emotionally because the day before I read this story, I was so emotionally, physically and spiritually drained that I lost it when the receptionist at the Eye Clinic told me that my contacts would cost double what I was expecting. I know what it feels like to be so busy, so stretched, so frazzled that joy is hard to find and I'm afraid that

just two days ago I took it out on an incredibly kind and patient woman who was just doing her job.

There are lots of reasons why we struggle to find joy. Many are much more traumatic and life-changing than just being frazzled by the busyness of the Advent season. I'm sure you could give me a long list from your own lives. In our scripture today, the apostle Paul was writing to the church in Philippi. What's really interesting to note is that he wrote this particular letter from prison. Paul was in prison more than once during his ministry and it's not clear which prison he was writing from this time. He could have been in Rome or Caesarea or even Corinth. But we can be sure that his situation was grim. Mediterranean prisons in the first-century were dark, damp, cold and full of vermin.

And yet, Paul writes a letter that is full of peace, hope, love and even joy. In today's passage he writes to the people in Philippi, "Rejoice in the Saviour always! I say it again: Rejoice! Let everyone see your forbearing spirit." In case you're wondering, a "forbearing spirit" is one of patience, gentleness, and restraint. Paul knows that even in the midst of the struggle of our daily living it is possible to find joy and with it peace and love.

But how do we do that? Well first I want to share with you a definition of joy that I think is truly wonderful. It was written by a woman named Adela Rogers St. John and it goes like this:

Joy seems to me a step beyond happiness. Happiness is a sort of atmosphere you can live in sometimes when you're lucky. Joy is a light that fills you with hope and faith and love.

“Joy is a light that fills you with hope and faith and love.” Joy is, in essence, the Spirit of God, the Holy Mystery, the Christ, the Ground of our Being, the sacred in whatever way we want or need to name or imagine it. When we are searching for joy we are essentially searching for the sacred that resides within each and every one of us. That's the reason that Paul told the people of Philippi to take their cares to God, to pray, to connect with the Holy. In order to find joy we have to give ourselves the time and space to be with God.

There are many places where we can go to find joy. One of the places that I go is nature, creation itself. This week, in midst of my busyness, I had the opportunity to experience the awe-inspiring wonder of the night sky filled with the Geminid meteor shower. How many of you saw this amazing phenomenon? Taking the time to gaze at that light-filled sky and watch those shooting stars was an incredibly sacred and joyous moment. Moments like that can fill our hearts and help us get through the less joyful parts of our days.

I am going to end today with the conclusion of Victoria Price's blog, the story that we started with. As you listen I invite you to insert your name for the sacred whenever Victoria uses the word joy. She writes:

Over the past thirteen months of writing this blog, I have discovered many of the places joy resides -- on back roads, in connections with dear friends, at horror conventions, in discovering new places, in writing, in public speaking, in spiritual practice, in long walks, in travel, in animals, in photography, in flowers, in birds, in words. But where does it reside in ME? Finding that out is why I have sold most of my possessions and given myself over to this process so completely...

...Why is this so difficult? Because so many of us have come to believe that hard work is more important than joy, that making the time to take care of ourselves is egotistical, that living a passionate life is a pipe dream, that self-care is selfish..

...Joy is here for us all -- in all the places where we seem to feel emptiness, the spaces in between us, the unknowns that try to scare us. Right where all the jangling of busyness, excitement, or even fear seem to be -- Joy is.

But to feel it, to live it, we have to open our hearts, our minds, our homes, and our lives to it. Joy needs me and joy needs you -- just as much as we need joy. And we all need one another -- just as we need the birds and the animals and the fishes and the trees and the flowers, and they need us. So roll down your windows and crank up the radio: It's time for us all to sing out our JOY TO THE WORLD!

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