

***“I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart!
Where? Down in my heart!”***

Sound familiar to any of you? Ring any bells? Chances are if you went to any form of a Christian camp, you were likely to hear this song or some version of it. This rendition of an old gospel song pops into my head frequently from my old Camp Hat Creek days. It instantly brings a smile to my face and floods my memories with joyful ones no matter what I’m doing when it resurfaces. It’s amazing how a small, simple reminder like that can bring such strong emotions.

Now, today is about being “Rooted in Joy.” When I first discovered this was the topic scheduled for this Sunday, my stomach did a flip or two. You see, I’m a person that can be crippled by anxiety and brought down by depression, so, to me, joy has seemed fleeting above all else. Anxiety and depression have been my bullies and my best friends for the majority of my life. I can’t pinpoint where they came into play like some people can. They just... are. It’s how I’m wired. And I don’t say that to get your sympathy or empathy and especially not your pity. I say it as an acknowledgement; I claim it and, in claiming it, I take away some of its power.

But I didn’t necessarily feel like I was the best person to address being rooted in joy because that just feels foreign to me. HOWEVER, I am a big believer of acknowledging both sides of the coin—in the idea to fully be aware or appreciate something, you have to experience and understand the other side. Anxiety and depression seem like the complete antithesis to joy, wouldn’t you agree?

When I thought about the other fruits of the spirit—love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control as identified for us in Galatians 5—those sounds like they had pretty concise opposites. At least one or two clear opposites...

Self-control – no constraint, no discipline

Gentleness – rough, rude

Faithfulness – unbelieving, infidelity

Goodness – bad, evil

Kindness – selfish, judgmental

Patience – impatience, rushed

Peace – chaos, upheaval

Love – hate

But joy’s opposite feels like all of that combined to me. Would you agree? Think about it. If you’re experiencing someone else who has no discipline, who is rude, who is unfaithful in commitments, who has bad or evil intentions, who is selfish or judgmental, who is constantly

impatient or rushed, who is chaotic and creating upheaval, or who is hateful in any way.... That just sucks the joy right out of anything or anyone.

Side note: we can be quick to identify these shortcomings in others, but I feel we overlook or pardon ourselves too quickly... We have to hold ourselves accountable before we can hold others accountable.

So, at best, like I said, joy has felt pretty fleeting to me. Though, in the last year or so I've made some great strides in counseling and personal self-reflection. And in claiming my anxiety and depression, opening up about it, and working through some of it, joy has evolved to feel like the glue for everything else. It weaves itself in and out of everything. It creates the basket, if you will, to carry the rest of the fruits in—the fruits of the spirit.

First, I feel like we have to address the difference between joy and happiness. They are not the same thing. Adela Rogers St. Johns—an American journalist, novelist, and screenwriter born in the late 19th century—said that “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” (Brown, 79).

In her book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Brené Brown uses an explanation by Anne Robertson—a Methodist pastor, writer, and executive director of the Massachusetts Bible Society—of the difference between happiness and joy:

“...the Greek word for happiness is *Makarios*, which was used to describe the freedom of the rich from normal cares and worries, or to describe a person who received some form of good fortune, such as money or health.... the Greek word for joy...is *chairō*. Chairō was described by the ancient Greeks as the ‘culmination of being’ and the ‘good mood of the soul.’ Robertson writes, ‘Chairō is something, the ancient Greeks tell us, that is found only in God and comes with virtue and wisdom. It isn’t a beginner’s virtue; it comes as the culmination....’” (Brown, 80).

Dr. Brené Brown—who is a professor, lecturer, author, and podcast host, among other things—says that “...neither joy nor happiness is constant; no one feels happy all of the time or joyful all of the time. Both experiences come and go. Happiness is attached to external situations and events and seems to ebb and flow as those circumstances come and go. Joy seems to be constantly tethered to our hearts by spirit and gratitude” (Brown, 29). Remember...

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Being joyfully rooted in God goes deep. It’s not surface level. It isn’t superficial. It requires grit and commitment.

There’s a Baptist pastor named John Piper with whom I don’t always agree theologically, but he put out a pretty on-point definition of joy in a Christian context that we’ll use for today: “Joy is a good feeling. In the soul. Produced by the Holy Spirit. By causing us to see the glory and beauty of Jesus Christ.” (*repeat*)

“When things are going well, we feel elated. When hardships come, we sink into depression. But true joy transcends the rolling waves of circumstance. Joy comes from a consistent relationship with Jesus Christ. When our lives are intertwined with his, he will help us walk through adversity without sinking into debilitating lows and manage prosperity without moving into deceptive highs. The joy of living with Jesus Christ daily will keep us levelheaded, no matter how high or low our circumstances” NIV Life Application Study Bible, 1775).

Regardless of how much joy we believe we have, the hard times always come. Hurdles appear out of nowhere. Obstacles are created both by ourselves and others. Mole hills or mountains—or both—seem immovable and impossible. It’s inevitable, folks. And I would like to second Brene Brown’s opinion in regards to this matter: “...I’d love to skip over the hard stuff, but it just doesn’t work. We don’t change, we don’t grow, and we don’t move forward without the work. If we really want to live a joyful, connected, and meaningful life, we *must* talk about the things that get in the way” (Brown, 25).

“Joy is as thorny and sharp as any of the dark emotions. To love someone fiercely, to believe in something with your whole heart, to celebrate a fleeting moment in time, to fully engage in a life that doesn’t come with guarantees—these are risks that involve vulnerability and often pain... We can’t make a list of all the ‘bad’ emotions and say, ‘I’m going to numb these’ and then make a list of the positive emotions and say, ‘I’m going to fully engage in these!’ You can imagine the vicious cycle this creates: I don’t experience much joy so I have no reservoir to draw from when hard things happen. They feel even more painful, so I numb. I numb so I don’t experience joy. And so on” (Brown, 73).

I’ve said before that “I believe without doubt, there can be no faith. Without bad days, you can’t know the good days. Without darkness, you can’t appreciate the light.” I extend that today to say you don’t know joy until you know its opposite. And if you try to numb the other stuff, you won’t experience true joy. As Christians, if we don’t witness to or acknowledge, trust, and believe in the crucifixion of Christ, we certainly can’t celebrate and rejoice in his resurrection.

But in a world that can seem so full of darkness, how can we find the light? How can we find the joy woven into it all?

1. Practicing gratitude.
2. Being vulnerable.
3. Creating true connection with God and others.

The “darkness” can be heavy and overwhelming. But when we practice gratitude, we can begin to spot joy more readily, bobbing and weaving to create the joy basket carrying more love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. After all, “... gratitude without practice may be a little like faith without works—it’s not alive” (Brown, 79).

A couple of weeks ago, my wheels were already turning on how I wanted to approach this sermon, how I felt God was leading me to lead you. I pretty much knew in the process I would be addressing some of my own stuff—my own darkness—along the way. I could lean into it or I could run. I chose to lean.

I first leaned on a group of women that are quickly becoming some of the brightest lights in my life. There are about a dozen of us and we have a group text going. I sent a message to them asking that if they experience joy or witness someone else experiencing joy to share it with me be it in words or images. And that's what we have been doing for a little more than 3 weeks now. I don't necessarily know about them, but it's meant all the difference to me. They shared scriptures and graduation celebrations. Vacation adventures and home improvement projects. Cradling of a newborn and cherishing a loved one who has now lived 91 complete years and is still going! Childhood and personal milestones being met all around. Baking, swinging, painting. Friendships growing. Family bonding. Love deepening. The thread became the epitome of joy.

Asking others to share their joy was a vulnerable thing for me because I was asking for help. I cast it out initially as "research" and "crowd-sourcing," but it was me asking for help to spot the joy because I could see anxiety barreling down the mountain before me, ready to consume me. But it was also a vulnerable thing for those fabulous women to actually step up and participate—sharing their lives, boasting their triumphs big and small, and, most importantly, embracing the joy for themselves. But in practicing that vulnerability, I feel we have all taken some steps further into the light of joy. I think they have more readily identified joy in their lives at my prompting, but they have, in turn, enabled me to spot the joy surrounding me.

Truth is, we all do better with a sense of community. And in specific regards to God-filled joy, we especially need community. To support when it gets hard. To celebrate when it gets good. To wait when we are in between. We were created by our Creator as relational people! When we do anything less, we are insulting our God.

After all, do you remember what the greatest commandment is? I like the gospel of John's wording best: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34). Most of the time it is quoted as that "you love one another as yourself." Personally, if I was loving other people the way I was loving myself, honestly, it wouldn't be that great. I short-change myself in that department—I'm working on it though. But when I can reorient that command to love others as Jesus has loved me, that's a better ideal for me to chase, a better way for me to measure.

When I texted that group of friends, almost immediately sent a message back with a beautiful picture with the words, "Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes in the morning" from our Psalm 30 reading. What perfect place for us to land for us this morning! "...the church throughout its history has used psalms as lyrics for hymns as well as liturgy for

recitation” (Creach, 1). Psalm 30 actually gives us a great formula to cultivate joy as Christians, partnering with the three steps previously identified, which Jerome Creach identifies: “...praise and thanks for deliverance and restoration (vv.1-3), an invitation for others to join (vv. 4-5), narrative of the crisis... (vv. 6-10).” Creach goes on to add one final, fourth step which is simply “...repetition of praise and thanks (vv. 11-12)” (Creach, 158). Repeating praise and thanks gives power to the joy, makes it more real, makes it easier to believe, makes it more celebratory. “Repeat the sounding joy!” like at Christmas.

And then of course we read the John text about Jesus being the true vine, us being the branches. It only seemed fitting to me to revisit the John 15 text again because that’s where we began, it has rooted us in this “Rooted” series, AND today just happens to be exactly the middle point of this series. It is the 9th Sunday of the series, with 8 Sundays preceding and 8 more Sundays to go. I had to chuckle when I realized joy was literally in the middle of it all; it weaves itself into everything after all...

Anyway, Peter told us in the very beginning that “Our goal throughout these... weeks will be to unpack faith and life, church and culture, practice and emotion, all the while keeping in mind the imagery of what it means to be ‘ROOTED’ and why being ‘ROOTED’ is so important for us and our faith” (Rev. Peter A. Thompson, “Rooted: What and Why?” 13 May 2020).

We addressed the question in that first sermon of this series: Why are roots important? Do you remember? It comes in the charge at the end of that John reading: At the end, Jesus explains himself, “I’ve told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature.”

“The intensity of Jesus’ speech is suddenly relieved by his sudden reference to joy (15:11). ‘Joy’ is a significant... theme [in the gospel of John]. John the Baptist’s joy is fulfilled with the presence of the Jesus (3:29). The author of 1 John writes to complete the joy of his readers (1:4). Jesus in his final prayer speaks of the completion of the disciples’ joy (17:13). Evidently, joy is an essential aspect of the eschatological life that Jesus has brought” (Smith, 284).

Friends, because of Christ, in Christ, through Christ, our joy can be complete. Even with his tragic death, there is joy. Joy came again in the morning. It can be so for us too. In practicing gratitude, being vulnerable, and creating authentic connection as Christians together. It isn’t easy but it is necessary and so worth the effort.

Have any of you seen Disney’s Pixar movie *Inside Out*?? If you haven’t, you need to. Everyone. All ages. Even though I’m going to summarize it pretty well right now, you still need to watch it in full. Truly, this movie changed my life. And was the motivational source for a lot of this message today...

It's about this girl named "Riley [who] is a happy, hockey-loving 11-year-old Midwestern girl, but her world turns upside-down when she and her parents move to San Francisco." Minnesota to San Francisco—quite a change. "Riley's emotions—led by Joy—try to guide her through this difficult, life-changing event. However, the stress of the move brings Sadness to the forefront. When Joy and Sadness are inadvertently swept into the far reaches of Riley's mind, the only emotions left in Headquarters are Anger, Fear and Disgust" (Google). It is both literally and figuratively an emotional journey.

Children in general are primarily led by Joy. I believe that's how we enter this world—wired for Joy and all the good things. It's one of the main reasons I absolutely love my job; kids *always* remind me of the joy. And in observing Riley being led by Joy in the movie, it immediately reminded Matthew's gospel when Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

But when Joy and Sadness are swept away, leaving Anger, Fear and Disgust in charge, it's a *whoooole* different world for Riley. Riley doesn't understand it and is having a hard time processing it. Her parents are at a loss too because she is acting totally different from her normal happy-go-luck-goofball self. Riley tries her best in the absence of Joy and Sadness, but makes some bad decisions. (What do you expect with Anger, Fear, and Disgust running the show?) Riley returns home toward the end of the movie to her parents, who are sick with fear and grief, and Riley just breaks down, standing in front of her parents. She shows her weakness, admits her fear, confesses her struggle openly and honestly to them. And you know what happens? Her parents confess their own shortcomings, confess their own fear and struggles. And embrace her with open arms and hearts. They cry with her.

Isn't it kind of the same with God? God doesn't expect us to carry the weight of the world on our shoulders. We are in God's hands, remember? "***He's got the whole world in his hands...***" We have to open up. We have to admit our struggle. We confess our shortcomings and failing to God. And then, only then, can we make more room to spot joy being woven in and around us. We can't experience true joy without talking about all the crap that gets in the way, that blocks us, that challenges us, that breaks us both with God and with other people.

Friends, because we are created, named, and claimed by God, we've got that "***joy, joy, joy, joy down in our hearts! Where? Down in our hearts!***" So look for joy. Seek joy. Identify joy. Cling to joy. Celebrate joy. Share joy. Cultivate joy. **Be ROOTED in joy.** Let all God's children say... **Amen.**