

## Passing of the Joy of God

Mark 1:9-15, Luke 2:10, John 15:11, Nehemiah 8:10, Psalm 118:24, Philippians 4:4,  
Romans 14:17, Isaiah 55:12, Hosea 6:6

February 26, 2012

*Pastor James York*

Joy is at the heart of the way of Christ. Jesus entered the world on a high note of jubilation: **Luke 2:10** “**I bring you good news of a great joy,**” proclaimed the angel “**Joy shall come to all the people!**” Jesus left the world filling the disciples with God’s joy. Jesus said, **John 15:11** “**These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.**” God is joy. We are created in God’s image therefore we are designed to be joyful and radiate joy. The Apostle Paul declares joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Joy enlivens us. The prophet Nehemiah declares, **Nehemiah 8:10** “**...the joy of the Lord is your strength!**”

If you want to have a holy lent, if you desire to honor God with your life, if you are striving to be the beautiful glorious person God created you to be, then you need to be loving and joyful. Love is the Bible’s favorite topic. Joy is second. God commands that we be joyful. The psalmist declares, **Psalm 118:24** “**This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.**” The Apostle Paul commands, **Philippians 4:4** “**Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!**” God’s command to be joyful would be harsh and unrealistic if it were based on our earthy circumstances. Rather joy is a gift, a blessing of God, a precursor of resurrection. Joy flows from God into us to sustain us on our earthly pilgrimage until we are completely filled and surrounded with joy in heaven.

The season of Lent is modeled after the 40 days between Jesus baptism and the beginning of his ministry which was a one sentence sermon. The gospel of Mark explains. **Mark 1:9-15** “**In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. Jesus was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."**

Jesus began his ministry by being filled with God’s joy. Jesus was approximately 30 years old at the time of his baptism. Jesus was fully God, therefore fully love, fully joy

and Jesus was fully human. How much do you think the fully human nature of Jesus limited Jesus, clouding his mind, constricting his heart? After living on earth for 30 years was Jesus still always extravagant in his love and exuberant in joy? What do you think the thoughts were like in Jesus mind? Was there a debate between his fully human and fully God thoughts? In Jesus' heart, were there fully human and fully God feelings swirling around? Being human, living on earth in a fallen world is extremely difficult; there is pain, suffering, disease, struggle and mess everywhere. In being human it appears that sometimes hate, fear and sin are more destructive than the healing of love, joy and grace. Did Jesus need an infusion of love and joy? Did Jesus need a reminder of the glory of heaven?

Scripture explains, **Mark 1:10** “**And just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.**” There is an abundance happening in this one sentence. The heavens, the firmament, the veil was torn open. Our joyful, loving God was so excited to embrace Jesus that God quickly torn apart the heavens so God and all the glory of heaven could embrace Jesus. Jesus had to become fully human to identify with us, to be our representative, to pay the debit of our sin, to be our high priest. Jesus became fully human so our prayers, struggles, doubts and lack of joy could be experienced by Jesus so Jesus can fully understand us and renew us. For justice sake, Jesus had to become fully human, but this was not going to stop God from enjoying a precious moment with Jesus. Jesus baptism is a sign of the perfect loving relationship between God the Creator, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fills Jesus completely with light, peace, love and joy. The Holy Spirit descended like a dove. The dove is a symbol of God's presence in our lives, therefore the dove symbolizes the essence of God which is love, peace and joy. Dove is the meaning of Jonah's name. Jonah went to Nineveh proclaiming, repent and in so doing they were saved.

Scripture explains. **Mark 1:10-11** “**10 And just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."** There is another whole sermon in "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." for people pleasers. Jesus has not even begun his ministry. Jesus has done nothing to earn God's love yet God loves Jesus and is well pleased. The Message translates it. God told Jesus you are the pride of my life. It must have been tremendously comforting for Jesus to know that God loves him and is please with him when Jesus had not yet done that which he came to do. This is the unconditional love and joy God has for each one of us. This kind of love and joy empowers us to do what we are called to do; to love and to be joyful out of gratitude. God's joyful love empowered Jesus to spread God's blessings throughout the world.

Scripture continues. **Mark 1:12-13** “**12 And the Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness. Jesus was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan;**

**and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on Jesus.”** Immediately before the fully human nature of Jesus could forget or cloud the power of God’s love and joy, Jesus is brought face to face with Satan to prove that love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, peace is stronger than fear and joy is stronger than gloom. Over the next three years Jesus would confront the culmination of them all, in his crucifixion. Jesus knew God’s light, peace, love and joy would prevail. In those 40 days, Jesus endured and overcame Satan’s horrific temptations. Jesus was able to foretell his crucifixion while telling the disciples, “ I came to make your joy complete”, because Jesus had already defeated Satan in the wilderness.

At the end of the 40 days scripture continues. **Mark 1:14-15 “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."** The good news is that the Kingdom of God spilled out upon Jesus when God tore open the heavens and at that moment, Satan was defeated. Every temptation and all the powers of darkness had been conquered. Over the next three years, Jesus revealed snippets of the Kingdom of God through his ministry. Every Sunday during Lent we will examine a different facet of the joyful Kingdom of God.

The Bible has a lot to say about the Kingdom of God. It is far too glorious to explain or understand. Jesus often used parables to give us a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. The Apostle Paul said **Romans 14:17 “God’s kingdom is what God does with your life as God sets it right, puts it together and completes it with joy. The Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”** The prophet Isaiah expresses it as **Isaiah 55:12 “You will live in joy and peace. The mountains and hills will burst into song, and the trees of the field will clap their hands!”**

Jesus said. **Mark 1:15 “...the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."** Repentance is a change of mind, and heart; repentance means new attitudes, fresh patterns of behavior. To repent is to turn, to be converted. To repent is to turn from sin to God. To repent is refusing to live in yesterday and instead to live today with freedom, love and joy. Sometimes, especially during lent, we get stuck in partial repentance. We are able to let go of something yet we fail to allow ourselves receive God’s blessings. Sometimes I hear someone explain that they gave up chocolate, soda or something for lent. That is great if it brings you closer to God, makes you more loving and joyful. The ancient discipline of fasting is a two part discipline giving something up so you can add something Godly to your life. It is letting go so you can receive. You give up food so you can spend that time praying. You give up something so you have more time to serve, love or worship God. You give up something so you have space in your life to celebrate, enjoy God and be joyful. Letting go without letting in has been a challenge since the very beginning. The prophet Hosea proclaimed God’s words. **Hosea 6:6 “I want you to show love not offer sacrifices. I want you to know me more than I want burnt offerings.”**

Jesus said not simply “repent!” rather **Mark 1:15** “...repent and believe in the good news.” Jesus said this immediately after defeating Satan in the wilderness, defeating every form of hate with love, defeating darkness with light, defeating fear with peace, defeating gloom with joy.

Walter Burghardt preached. “Repent and believe in the Good News’. Believe in life—Christ's life and your life, life here and hereafter, life now and for ever. If you want to repent, live! Come alive! Christ is alive, more gloriously alive than when he walked the rugged roads of Palestine, that "Jesus dances still" Do you believe that, with Christ risen, death no longer has power over you, will hold you captive no more than a swift moment, that you too will dance around death, will rise to a life beyond your wildest dreams? Do you believe that you are already risen with Christ, because his life courses through you like another bloodstream? Only if you do can Lent be life for you. For what is it to repent in Lent? I turn more and more completely to a living Christ. I adopt ‘the attitude which Christ Jesus had’” Jesus is peace, love and joy.

John Wesley described Lent as a season to let righteousness, peace and joy enliven you, to let God open the joyful glory of heaven in your soul.

Walter Burghardt said. “We Christians have given Lent a bad name. The first Preface for Lent announces ‘this joyful season’. Lent is for festivity. Lent is for celebration.” Lent is letting God reshape your lives: from death to life, from sin to love, from fate to freedom. Lent is a time to discover how to live, love and be joyful.

Lent contrasts the gloom of humanity and the joy of God, making joy stand out all the more brilliantly against the darkness. Lent began last Wednesday with ashes. Ashes are the residue of burned-out fires, burned-up stars, burned-up dreams. Ashes are an appropriate symbol for the lousy, gloomy state of humanity. Cold, dark and lifeless, ashes symbolize that a lot on earth is not right, that humanity has settled in the dust, settled for the worst when we could choose to shine with the radiant, joyful love of God. Last Wednesday we were asked to confess and to let go. Today we are inviting to let come God’s blessings. Last Wednesday we were asked to acknowledge our pain, sin, hurt, guilt, regrets and struggles. Today we are invited to receive the glory of the Kingdom of God. Last Wednesday we were marked with ashes. Today know that ashes under pressure become diamonds. Today know that ashes are carbon and carbon is the building block of life. Last Wednesday we were marked with the ashes of finitude and mortality. Today we hear the promise of eternal life as Jesus rises up out of the baptismal waters. Last Wednesday we were in the wilderness, bombarded with temptation, our mind clouded, our heart constricted. Today we hear the good news. Jesus, fully human, was sustained and overcame every temptation. Jesus emerged radiant, proclaiming and living God’s love and joy. Jesus knows exactly how to fill you with joy. The Holy Spirit is eager to fill you with the glory of the Kingdom of God.

The good news is not denial; it is not being joyful despite your circumstances. The good news is realizing the worst will be redeemed, realizing that even though you are

burnt out, burnt up and mere ash Jesus is making you radiant. You will shine like the sun. You will be loving, joyful and glorious. The good news is you, me, all of us and the entire cosmos is coming fully alive with God's joy.

God is joy. Joy is all around us. Joy is in us. Jesus came to fill us with God's abundant joy. Strive to perceive joy. When you see joy, celebrate. When you feel joy, dance. When you share joy, laugh. Name your joys. Indulge in your joys. Share your joys. Joy is a precursor of your resurrection. I hope your Lent will be a joyful season, a festivity, a celebration of the Good News of great joy who is dispersing all gloom. Amen.