



LESSONS for LIFE

MAY 24, 2009 11:00 a.m.
MAKING THE JOY COMPLETE
Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes, C.M.

SACRED READINGS

Lesson: MICAH 6: 8

Gospel: JOHN 17: 11 - 13

In the gospel reading this morning you heard the words of Jesus to the disciples, his prayer for them. He prayed that the joy might be complete in them. In another place in the gospel reading Jesus said, *I have taught you all these things so that my joy might be in you and that your joy might be complete.* Earlier Jesus was describing the purpose of why He came and He said, *I have come that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly.* So I want to talk to you this morning about your joy meter: where you are on your scale of your joy meter; whether life is pretty miserable, pretty awful, just scraping through down at that zero to one or whether you are at that other end of the scale and, if I was more flexible I could get my arm over there (Brent was holding up his hand and arm to demonstrate) to the ten on the scale where life is amazing day after day, moment after moment. My guess is that if I asked you to take a look at the last five or ten years of your life – where are you most of the time on the joy scale, experiencing those wonderful ‘aha’ amazing overwhelming moments? My guess is that most of us would probably say we are relatively low on the joy scale; that there are those occasional spikes when something happens in our lives: maybe a new person comes into our lives and all of a sudden our friends who’ve experienced us here notice that all of a sudden we’re excited and happy about life because of a new person; or, if you have thirteen friends from Alberta who have just read those lottery ticket numbers this week (laughter), I would bet that joy scale has gone up quite a bit! But if you’ve been around a little bit you know that those spikes often don’t last very long; maybe the aura wears off and you may still be in love but you’re not quite as ecstatic about the person sitting across the table every morning; or maybe the joy of a lottery win or something in your life has worn off.

You know, the reality is that we get it backwards. Instead of us experiencing joy when those spikes happen in our lives, the reality is our life is to be about joy not so much connected to the spikes, not so much at all connected to the external events or people. When Jesus said, *I’ve taught you all these things so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete*, if we want to experience more joy, if we want to live here or here in terms of the joy meter in our lives, our regular every day living – less reliant on the spikes – our every day living, then there are some things we can learn or do to help us with that.

So I want to talk this morning about how we might experience more joy in our lives. Now to make this work you’ve got to take some more responsibility for the joy in your lives instead of just looking to others hoping that others will raise the meter, or letting others take the meter way down because of something they say or something they do. *That my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete.* You know, it’s almost like someone saying – and you’ll understand why I’m using this analogy later on in the service – it’s almost like someone saying they want a new house and they want someone to deliver it to them and they are waiting for this new house to arrive, when all the materials are there to build this new house. So instead of looking for someone to deliver it to you it’s a matter of getting busy and building it. The same thing with joy. Instead of waiting for someone to give you that joy, to deliver it to you, it’s a



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matter of making sure the components are in place, because I believe the message of the gospel, the message of Jesus is that joy is already there and available to us – every day, all the time. So the first step is that piece of awareness; that joy is our own responsibility. It's given to us; it's not about someone external; it's not about some great event in our life. It's about what we decide to do: to build joy as a component of our lives.

So I want to talk a little bit about the context for joy. You know, it's been said that most of the anxiety of our lives is either that we are upset about the past – something we've done or someone else has done – or we're worrying about the future; and if we could focus more on the NOW, this moment, that we would be able to experience more joy in our lives. So part of the context of joy is being in the now: not fretting, not blaming but being in the now.

I want to talk about a value that's crucial to a joyful life. I want to talk about an attitude that's crucial and I want to talk about some virtues that are crucial. It sounds like a long list but I'm going to move quickly through them.

The first value. Now one of the first central cores of all of the world's major religions is what I talked about on Mother's Day: compassion. The choir sang about it in their anthem this morning; you know, if you could walk in another person's shoes, if you could see what that other person sees, if you could live in the neighbourhood or the context of their lives; if we were able to exhibit and act out of compassion more in our lives instead of judging others, instead of making an assumption about others, instead of – if you're like me – I rant and rave a lot in my mind, assuming that someone is doing something because of some negative reasons that I've sort of invented in my mind. If we can practice the value of compassion in our lives then we're beginning to create that foundation for which more joy can be experienced because there's that universal and spiritual principle that says you get what you give. If you give compassion then you will receive more compassion.

The attitude I want to talk about is the attitude that Jesus was talking about in this section of the scripture just before I read the piece that I read: the attitude of unity. Jesus is talking about everyone being one together as He and God were one together. Some of the other world religions do a much better job than Christianity has done historically in talking about the 'oneness' with all that is; and if we can move out of our own kind of exclusionary space to be able to see the others around us, the person that we may disagree with be at one with them, the group that are taking a position that we don't like – be at one with them; a group around the world that we may never encounter – be at one with them. If we can practice as an attitude on a regular basis, the attitude of unity together, again we are creating that foundation for joy in our lives.

Then we come to these virtues and again, these six virtues and I said seven this morning at the nine o'clock service and everyone was hanging for the seven – and there's only six! These six virtues, if we practice these six virtues in our lives then again we're building that foundation, building that house within which joy can be experienced.

The first virtue is wisdom/knowledge. If we could practice in our lives that we don't know it all. If we could be open to learning and growing in a new way; if instead of trying to defend our position, if instead we're open to what the universe might say to us, then we'll experience more joy in our lives. I'll give you an example: I'm planning a sermon for coming weeks where I'm going to get a person from a more fundamentalist background in our church and a person from another faith or a more progressive or



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liberal background in our church to do a joint sermon, with the two of them doing a joint sermon saying “Here’s where I come from,” and “Here’s where I come from,” and on some of these issues we don’t agree with each other, but that’s okay, because the good news, the umbrella of MCC Toronto means that we can co-exist together. So I started this out by approaching a young man who’s from a pretty fundamentalist background to see if he would be the person to represent that fundamentalist space and he said, “Well I wouldn’t mind at all, Brent, but I’m not sure I’m there any more. That’s where I came here from.” And I said, ‘That’s fine,’ – in transition; that willingness to grow, to learn a virtue.

The second virtue is courage. You know, if you’re going to live your life based on being a victim – for whatever reason – or live your life out of fear, then you’re not very likely to experience a lot of joy; but if you exert some courage to move away from that victim place, some courage to be able to take on the issues and the challenges that you face, then joy will more likely be a component.

The third virtue: Love/Humanity, love for yourself, love for others around you, love for the person you get along with, love for the person you don’t. I’m going to encourage you this week to make up a list of the five people who are still alive who you like the least (laughter), and just see what you might do to try to be more loving. Now I’m not asking you – if that person was an abusive person in your life – I’m not asking you to place yourself in that vulnerability again, not at all. I’m not asking you to call them, write them or see them, but how could you be more loving, how could you pray for that person, how could you care for that person. Now that you’re all mad at me I’m going to go back to my next point.

The fourth virtue: Justice. Justice we’ve gotten backward in our society today because we’ve associated justice with vengeance. You know, we want justice, we want to bring them to justice! That’s not the Biblical meaning of justice at all. Justice, when you take a look at it from the scriptural perspective is much more about what we might call today social justice. The first reading this morning from Micah says, what does God require of us? To do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God. To do justice means to stand up to the injustices in society, to find a place where you can make a difference to make the world a better place; to not sit back and just resent all the injustices or to be overwhelmed by the injustices but to take something on and to work to make the world a better place.

The fifth virtue: Temperance. Now whenever I think of temperance I think of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. That’s not what I’m talking about this morning. I’m talking about the virtue of temperance. You know, sometimes in our lives we get excited about something. Sometimes in our lives we enjoy something and then we become obsessive about it or we let it take over our lives. You know, the scripture says that all things are lawful but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful but I will not be controlled by anything, the apostle Paul said; and so there are many things in our lives and in our world that are okay, but we’re not to let those things take over our lives. Some of us are doing that with respect to work. We’ve become so obsessive about our work that many of the other things in our lives are suffering. Some of us are so obsessive about something in our lives that’s brought us joy and been good for us that we’ve become so obsessive about it that we become as if that’s the only way for us and the only way for other people to be able to experience goodness in their lives. Take a look – are there some areas where things have gotten too much control of your life that you need to come back to some balance or moderation in your life.

The final virtue is the virtue of spirituality/transcendence. You know, the stuff that’s been written by Eckhart Tolle in one of the courses connected with that and that’s been written by a number of authors today tell us that the best way to experience the holy, the best way to experience the holy in our lives is



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right now; and the more we can be in the now the more we can experience the holy. It's really interesting that as busy as our minds are, if all the self talk and clutter in our minds, it is in the quiet of our minds that God speaks, when we can move out the busyness and settle ourselves into quiet or stillness or holiness. The spirituality of being grateful for what is; spirituality focusing on the gift of life; spirituality focusing on that which is more than that which we see or touch or feel, that which joins all of us together: the holy or the divine, the connection. Spirituality and transcendence, moving beyond what is obvious to see what is there; making our way back again; making spirituality a priority again in our lives. Joy, the awareness of it; joy, the context, how we build the foundation for joy and being careful with the distractions and to not let people or events or addictions take away our joy.

Jesus said to the disciples, *I want my joy to be in you, so that your joy may be complete.* Jesus' intention was that you experience more joy in life; that it be a way of life and not just an occasional occurrence.

Amen.