October 26, 2014

Psalm 16

Joy

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Psalm 16 (New Revised Standard Version)

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.” As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight.  Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage. I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

It was my first church job interview in 1999 for my internship at Oak Lawn UMC. I was meeting with the SPRC which is like the personnel committee, and one person asked me, “Why are you so happy?” I did not know how to respond so I said, “I don’t know, I have just always been happy.” Apparently that was not the correct answer because after the meeting he pulled me aside and said, “I wanted you to say that you were so happy because of Jesus.” And I said, “Oh, okay.”

Bubbles make me happy. (Blow a bubble and says, "Oh, that makes me so happy!") But it just popped and now I am not so happy anymore. Being **happ**y is depending on what is **happ**ening around me, but joy is about depending on Jesus. As Psalm 16 tells us, God shows us the path of life. In God’s presence there is fullness of joy.

Lee and I left last Thursday for Newport, Rhode Island for the wedding of one of Lee’s childhood friends. Lee was one of the groomsmen and I officiated the wedding. We had a fabulous time and spent a few days after the wedding in Boston. One day we went on a Segway tour, and we did not fall off of our Segways! They are so much fun and we had a great time zooming around town.

The next day we went on a whale watching trip with the Boston Aquarium and as the boat is preparing to take off, I am being sentimental about turning 40 (tomorrow!) and I said, “Well, at least I don’t have gray hair yet.” And then Lee said he would check and he found two gray hairs! He even took a picture of them because I did not believe him! Being **happ**y is depending on what is **happ**ening around me, but joy is about depending on Jesus. We went east from Boston on the water for an hour and a half to a plateau where the ocean floor is closer by 100 feet. We saw three humpback whales, one mama and her calf and one male. Right before the boat had to head back to Boston, the mama and her calf jumped out of the water and breeched. It was amazing! There was no time for pictures, we just had to make a memory and enjoy it. Then, as we left the humpback whales, the male kept hitting his flipper on top of the water and it looked like he was saying goodbye to us.

We had a wonderful trip away with no obligations for our jobs, or our children, or our house, or anything. And then, we land in Dallas and Lee is concerned on the drive home because the car is pulling to one side. We get home and the tire is very low. So, when it is time to take Everett to soccer practice 15 minutes later, I get in the other car and it will not start! So, I take the car with the low tire, drop Lee and Everett at soccer practice and drive to Presbyterian Hospital because I want to see the newest members of the Greenland Hills family. I park at the hospital and check out the front tires and there are cracks on the sides of both front tires. They are low and cracked! Being **happ**y is depending on what is **happ**ening around me, but joy is about depending on Jesus. I held Emerson and August Mallory and prayed with Kristin and Connie and Paxton and marveled at the miracle of new life and got back in my car with the cracked, low tires and drove very slowly to soccer practice.

The next morning I was meeting my friend Joe to walk 18 miles around White Rock Lake because the Komen 3-day is in two weeks. I have to walk 60 miles in 3 days in 2 weeks! Now, my friend Joe is the pastor at Cockrell Hill UMC in Oak Cliff and his wife Debbie had breast cancer for ten years. And for the last two years I have walked in her memory and this year Joe wanted to walk to honor the memory of Debbie and to give thanks for her life. So, I drove the car with the cracked, low tires to White Rock Lake to walk with my friend Joe. Joe shared with me during our 6 hours of walking how hard the last two years have been. He said that some mornings it is hard to get up. And so many of his friends want him to remarry because then they think he will be all better. But he said to me, “Kerry, I am doing okay. I feel God’s presence with me everyday.”

He said that one of his friends had asked him how he could be okay after all that he has endured. And he said that living through breast cancer treatments and the journey towards death for his wife helped them both realize how precious this gift of life is. So, why would he get upset when someone cuts him off in traffic? He is alive and driving a car! Why would he get upset when a meeting does not go as planned? He is alive and he gets to go outside and enjoy God’s creation on a walk after the meeting. Why would he get upset when there is someone mad at his church? He is a part of a loving community of faith and God is with him in the struggle of every day. Walking beside his wife as she died enabled my friend Joe to not be bitter or angry, but instead to be filled with peace and joy. His wife is in God’s arms and the pain and suffering of the cancer treatments are at an end.

Friday afternoon I spent time with Ira, the dad of one of our church family, Debbie Morrow. Debbie’s dad has been battling cancer for three years and death is very close. We all prayed together and said the Lord’s Prayer and tears rolled down my face as I remembered Ira’s words to me two weeks ago. Ira was sharing with me how he is ready to die. He is at peace. And he smiled and said, “I have been so blessed. I have been loved and I have loved.” Ira’s heart is filled with joy that comes from God Almighty, who will welcome Ira with a loving embrace into the next part of his journey.

Being **happ**y is depending on what is **happ**ening around me, but joy is about depending on Jesus. In the Bible the word “happy” and “happiness” are said 30 times while “joy and rejoice” appear over 300 times.[[1]](#footnote-2) How do you get joy? You open yourself up to God and to God’s Holy Spirit. It is like that old joke, when you wake up do you say, “Dear Lord, it is morning!” Or do you say, “Dear LORD, it is morning.” What happens when joy is gone? What can you do to get more joy? On the front of your bulletin it has hands holding words: Love, Generosity, Joy. I believe that when we are generous we open ourselves up to more joy. When we are generous we open ourselves up to more love. The joy of generosity. When we are generous with our time, when we are generous with our talents, when we are generous with our money, we grow in joy. Paul Hollowell joined Greenland Hills last year and our children’s minister Kristin Mallory, who just had the most adorable twins, contacted him to teach Sunday School. Last Sunday when we were in Newport, Paul posted this on facebook, “The kids are jumping rope to the rhythm of the story of Daniel this morning.” And I just laughed and laughed. When we are generous with all that we have and all that we are, God’s joy is there. God’s love is there.

Joy is a powerful thing joy and it is easy to share because it is contagious. The joy you express to others multiplies as they become more joyful and can share their joy in turn. When we acknowledge that our joy comes from God, our faith is deepened and strengthened as we see God’s presence all around us. Joy is contentment that comes from our faith and trust in the Lord God Almighty. Joy is everlasting because God’s love for us is everlasting. In the Book of Philippians, which the Apostle Paul wrote while he was in prison, he uses the word “joy,” “rejoice,” and “joyful” 16 times. We can be joyful in Jesus Christ, despite our circumstances. Paul is in chains and aware that his life was coming to an end, and he talks about his faith and trust in Christ and how it had changed his whole perspective on suffering.

Paul says in Philippians that because he had been in prison for two years he had the opportunity to share the Gospel with all of the Roman guards and the Roman guards had spread the Gospel throughout all of Rome ([Philippians 1:12-24](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Philippians%201.12-24)). In Philippians 1:18 Paul says, “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice.” Paul goes on to encourage others to have peace knowing that God strengthens us ([Philippians 4:13](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Philippians%204.13)) and “supplies all our needs according to God’s riches in glory in Christ Jesus” ([Philippians 4:19](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Philippians%204.19)). [[2]](#footnote-3)

Happiness is fleeting because it depends on things outside of ourselves, but “true joy is eternal because it is based on our relationship with Jesus Christ, which is itself an everlasting source of joy.”[[3]](#footnote-4) “[Happiness is like rising bubbles, delightful and inevitably fleeting. Joy is the oxygen, ever present.](http://clicktotweet.com/WgH26)”[[4]](#footnote-5)

“Happiness is always passing through. Joy is the fiber of your soul.”[[5]](#footnote-6) Because joy comes from God and we are made in God’s image, our access to joy never vanishes. Because joy is God within us every other state or emotion can rest on top of joy, it can accommodate everything.[[6]](#footnote-7) So, it is possible to grieve with your whole heart, and still sense joy. You can feel rage, and be aware of joy waiting patiently for you to return. You can get fired, dumped, dumped on, and pulled through the eye of a needle, and still feel held by God’s joy that is within us.[[7]](#footnote-8)

God’s presence with us is when we feel that mighty warmth from within when we are in the lowest valley. When we are able to see God beside us through the pain. Imagine the heart-breaking passages of your life - betrayal, financial hardship, divorce, dreams dashed, being brought to the floor of your being - and what was there to be found? The simple joy of being alive, able to connect, breath, bless and be a blessing to others, to be broken, to be open, to be generous with all that you have and all that you are. Because joy comes from God, it is the love that lasts no matter what.[[8]](#footnote-9)

1. http://www.gotquestions.org/joy-happiness.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.gotquestions.org/joy-happiness.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://www.gotquestions.org/joy-happiness.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. http://www.daniellelaporte.com/definition-of-happiness-and-why-its-different-from-joy/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. http://www.daniellelaporte.com/definition-of-happiness-and-why-its-different-from-joy/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. http://www.daniellelaporte.com/definition-of-happiness-and-why-its-different-from-joy/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. http://www.daniellelaporte.com/definition-of-happiness-and-why-its-different-from-joy/ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. http://www.daniellelaporte.com/definition-of-happiness-and-why-its-different-from-joy/ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)