

Worship Leader 1: The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

Worship Leader 2: When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh
my adversaries and foes -
they shall stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.

**Everyone: One thing I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to seek God's presence.**

Worship Leader 1: For the Lord will hide me in God's shelter
in the day of trouble;

God will conceal me under the cover of God's tent...

Worship Leader 2: God will set me high on a rock.
Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me...

**Everyone: And I will offer in God's tent
sacrifices with shouts of JOY;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord!**

The Gospel John 15: 9-17††

Jesus said, "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. If you keep My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commands and remain in God's love. I have told you this so that My JOY may be in you and that your JOY may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit - fruit that will last - and so that whatever you ask in My name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other."

We've heard two scriptures about joy - one from the Psalms and one spoken by Jesus from John's gospel - and our songs this morning are all about joy. Joy is

unfamiliar to many of us, and there's certainly little evidence of joy in the world around us. I was given *The Book of Joy* for my birthday, and probably because there is such a lack of joy in the world, I have been drawn to it.... hungry to learn more about joy. *The Book of Joy* is a conversation between two spiritual leaders, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. I want to tell you a little about these two spiritual and political leaders, before we delve into more about joy. At the age of 16, the Dalai Lama was called upon to assume full political power as Head of State and Government when Tibet was threatened by an invasion by China. During the 1959 Tibetan uprising, the Dalai Lama escaped to India, where he has lived since then - 58 years - as a refugee. He travels the world, speaking about the welfare of Tibetans, the environment, economics, women's rights, non-violence, interfaith dialogue, physics, astronomy, Buddhism and science, cognitive neuroscience, and reproductive health. He's an advocate for a world free of nuclear weapons, and currently serves on the Advisory Council of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. In 1989 the Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize. He's 82 years old.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu is a South African anti-apartheid and social rights activist. He was the first black Archbishop of South Africa. He was an outspoken leader against apartheid, a brutal system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa. The Archbishop often compared apartheid to Nazism; as a result the government twice revoked his passport, and he was jailed briefly in 1980. Since the demise of apartheid, Archbishop Tutu has campaigned to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984; the Albert Schweitzer

Prize for Humanitarianism in 1986; the Sydney Peace Prize in 1999; the Gandhi Peace Prize in 2007; and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009. He's 81 years old.

The Dalai Lama and the Archbishop are friends, although neither speaks the other's language. They communicate through an interpreter. And from their life experiences of jail and exile, of hardship and heartbreak, and political activism, they've met to have conversations about joy. The Dalai Lama is Buddhist, and the Archbishop is a Christian. One of the loveliest things about *The Book of Joy* is how these two spiritual leaders speak with such respect and admiration for each other's religion. From the outset it's clear that kindness and respect play some part in joy.

Both of these men see a difference between happiness and joy, and both believe that joy is forged out of hardship. (This is an excerpt from the book) "The Dalai Lama said, 'Too much tiredness can lead us to feel frustration and anger. In my own case, when I encounter some difficult situation in the morning, my mind is calm, and it is much easier. When the same situation happens in the late evening, and I am a little bit tired, then I feel annoyed. So your basic physical condition makes a difference, whether your body is fresh, whether your mind is fresh. So this also shows how much depends on your own perception and your limited subjective view.'" [The author writes] "Next we had planned to discuss sadness and grief, feelings that so many try to avoid. I was very surprised to hear the Dalai Lama and the Archbishop explain how the royal road to joy would lead right through these emotions. Sadness is seemingly the most direct challenge to joy, but as the Archbishop argued strongly, it often leads us more directly to empathy and compassion and to recognizing our need for one another."

I haven't finished the book but at the back of it are several pages of "joy practices". I haven't finished the book so I can't tell you the secret of joy from these two spiritual leaders' perspectives... but I can tell you what I first heard, and dismissed, as a teenage seeker of Jesus. I learned that JOY was an acronym for Jesus, Others, and You. And with that teenage understanding that the world revolves around you, I was dismayed to find that "you" was last... and I dismissed the idea. But as I witness in the world around us, and in the larger world, a disheartening lack of kindness, and compassion, and unselfishness, this seemingly silly little acronym has come back to me, asking me to take another look. I'd like us to look together at this "joy practice".

The first letter of joy is "J" for Jesus. Maybe setting aside how Christianity is portrayed in the media, and how it's used to incite and manipulate people... what do we know about Jesus? He is God; He is the author of life and love; is our Redeemer; He was drawn to sinners and outcasts; He never withheld love from anyone; He lived as a servant, teaching, healing, helping; He gave His life for us. Jesus is the human and vulnerable face of God. He took on our humanity and lived among us, as one of us. Think for a moment about what you know about Jesus, and then look at the four questions under the word "Jesus". [music]

J ~ Jesus

*What have I learned and experienced about Jesus that's most important to me?

*Do I know Jesus as my Lord and Savior? Do I believe that He offers me forgiveness for my sin, and the promise of eternal life?

*What steps can I take to learn and experience more about Jesus, to help me be a more faithful follower?

*If we were face-to-face, what would I like to ask Jesus?

I met with Budd McKenzie on Friday morning to talk about his newest project: teaching kindness, compassion, and unselfishness to children in our school district. Budd told me about the difference between children in Afghanistan and children here... the difference in gratitude, and hope, and compassion... and although he didn't use the word "joy" it was clear that's also a difference. Budd asked me what opportunities there are at our church, for service, and especially opportunities for children to serve. I told this Mark Emerson that afternoon and his eyes lit up and he told me about service opportunities he'd like to create for our kids.

Budd told me that studies show that service teaches compassion and kindness, so needed in this highly competitive environment, where achieving is the highest goal. And in this "me first/my country first" environment we see a rise in intolerance, and unkindness, a lack of compassion and altruism... and no joy.

Jesus wrapped a towel around Himself and washed the feet of His disciples. He said, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You address Me as 'Teacher' and 'Master,' and rightly so. That is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other's feet. I've laid down a pattern for you. What I've done, you do." The "O" in joy is for others. Take a moment and reflect on the three questions below "Others".

O ~ Others

*How do I express the compassion and care of Jesus for all people?

*What need in the world (hunger, homelessness, poverty, hopelessness, peace, bigotry, children, etc.) burns in my heart? Do I see this as an invitation from Jesus to a ministry?

*Who could partner with me in this ministry?

In *The Book of Joy*, Archbishop Tutu says that Jesus commanded His followers to love others as well as they love themselves. The “Y” for “you” in joy takes us back to the “J” for Jesus. We can only love well as we open ourselves to be loved. We need to see ourselves as made in God’s image... as worthy of love, as God’s own beloved daughters and sons. This is a spiritual practice, to open ourselves to be loved... to let Jesus heal and cleanse our sin... to let Him fill our hearts with His love. Take a moment to reflect on the questions under the “Y” for yourself.

Y ~ Yourself

*How do I experience the love of Jesus in my life?

*Is there anything I’m aware of (my actions, prejudices, fears) that could be a barrier between me and Jesus’ love?

*What can I do to open myself to experience more of Jesus’ love for me?

*With whom do I share my spiritual life? Would it benefit me to be in a faith-sharing group? Do I have a soul-friend with whom I can talk about Jesus?

It turns out that joy is a spiritual practice... not something temporary but something deeper and more lasting than winning or satisfaction or happiness. Joy is a condition of the heart, and a hallmark of the Christian faith. Can we live in a constant state of joy? Probably not. But we can practice it by strengthening our relationship with Jesus, through serving others, and by opening ourselves, our hearts, our lives... to love... Jesus, others, and ourselves.