

the
Advent
of

sustainable



ADVENT 2019
www.triconchurch.org

the
Advent
of

sustainable



You are about to participate in a profound and meaningful adventure, a journey that very well might challenge deep-seated assumptions and possibly even reframe how you apprehend authentic Joy. To live a life of sustainable Joy is to discover a most precious gift from God, and it is something you already possess! But, like any gift, it must first be received and unwrapped.

Maybe you have known people who somehow remain Joyful even in sad or turbulent times. My grandmother was one, Desmond Tutu is another, as well as the Dalai Lama. I've visited people living in dreadful poverty, and others enduring life-threatening illnesses, who still radiate authentic Joy! These people I'm thinking of have very little in common other than consistently Joyful hearts. Every one of them is convinced that Joy is both endlessly available and innate in all of us, all the time.

This is the Joy God gives. It is an unshakable sense of well-being that is rooted deep within your soul. It is a Joy that is always accessible even in the most difficult times.

There is no question that we are living in a time of great uncertainty and growing anxiety. Every day, most of us are exposed to increasingly absurd behaviors and shockingly immoral actions from multiple world leaders. The chasm of polarization continues to widen in many nations as ideologies harden and verifiable facts become debatable opinion. Our planet is suffocating at such an astounding rate that many find it impossible to envision any future beyond a few decades. How can Joy be located in such a forlorn and insecure landscape?

For some, pursuing sustainable Joy is an exercise in foolish denial or naïve fantasy. Yet, authentic Joy is, nevertheless, unearthed and deepened everyday by those who choose to participate and commit to what is good and just and kind. This is a radical Joy that surfaces even in the hardest of times, a Joy that is neither foolish nor naïve. It is an orientation of the soul that eagerly anticipates the coming of a better day.

Anticipation is at the core of Advent and is also the birthplace of sustainable Joy. The very word “Advent” means “coming.” The first coming in Advent is remembering the birth of Jesus, and so we will sing *Joy to the World* throughout the season. Secondly, we know that God continues to be active in the world and with us in our lives today. And even greater still, we trust in the prophets and promises revealed in scripture that there will be the final coming, when God will be fully manifest, redeeming all things and reconciling the whole world with God once again. Advent is the anticipation that love will eventually and always win, and even now is on the way. As you anticipate the Advent of Sustainable Joy, may you engage authentically in this adventure and find Joy in one another. Anticipating Joy!

every day
may not be good
but there is
something good
in every day

Bob

Rev. Robert Brown, Senior Minister



Table of Contents

Pg. 5 Week One: What is Joy?

Pg. 13 Week Two: Unassailable Joy

Pg. 21 Week Three: Living in Joy





Week One: What is Joy?

Main Idea

The Joy that Christians experience because of their relationship with God is significantly different from happiness, and it can be found even in the presence of suffering.

Key Point

Many people use Joy and happiness as synonyms. Those who make a distinction usually define Joy as simply a more intense experience of happiness. The dictionary's definition — Joy as an intense and especially ecstatic or exultant happiness — supports this distinction. A different interpretation emanates from the world's great religious traditions, which see a qualitative difference between Joy and happiness, based on two characteristics.

The first characteristic concerns the sources of Joy and happiness. These traditions associate happiness with the pleasures of the material and carnal life: money, sex, food and drink, and the like. Kept in proper perspective, these things can be relished. It is when they are sought as ends in themselves that they are distorted, and become substitutes for Joy. Joy requires that people look beyond themselves. It is rooted in

love and community with our fellow human beings, and ultimately in complete trust in God, whom we love not because of the benefits that God may bestow upon us, but, as C.S. Lewis suggests, because of what He is in Himself, because God is the 'I Am.'

The second characteristic concerns the role of suffering. Happiness is defined in opposition to suffering; the latter can only diminish happiness. However, Joy can be deeply experienced and held even in the midst of genuine and unavoidable suffering. The key is finding meaning in our suffering; meaning ennobles us, lack of meaning embitters us. Various passages in both the Old Testament and the New Testament attest to these conceptions of happiness, Joy, and suffering as central tenets of the Christian faith.

Scripture

A classic statement on the futility of striving for happiness is found in,

Ecclesiastes 2:10

Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

But when God, and not fleeting pleasures, is our focus, then, we find encouragement to enjoy the mundane pleasures.



Ecclesiastes 9:7

Go, eat your bread with Joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, because it is now that God favors your works.

To Ponder and Discuss

Describe a time when working with God has brought you a sense of Joy.

The New Testament is replete with references to the nature of Joy, and the connection between Joy and suffering. Here, we shall concentrate on Paul, whose message is echoed by other authors of the New Testament. The Pauline letters are filled with the mood of rejoicing. In the New Testament, 40% of the occurrences of the word Joy and its cognates are found in Paul's letters, so Paul can be regarded as the theologian of Joy. The letter to the Philippians, written when Paul was imprisoned under circumstances of duress, with the outcome far from certain and death a possibility, is the most Joyous of his letters. His experience of Joy is both for the present moment and also fuels his conviction and hope in a Joyous final destiny.

Ultimate Joy is the indescribable and unsurpassable eternal fellowship with God in heaven. Paul yearns for this, but understands the need to wait.



Philippians 1:23-24

My desire is to depart to be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.

Even in this vale of tears, through faith and love, genuine Joy is present. Paul exhorts us to rejoice in the Lord, and not to worry.

Philippians 4:5-7

...but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Jesus Christ.

The New Testament scholar Gerald Hawthorne captures the quality of Joy that runs through Paul: *Joy is not so much a feeling as it is a settled state of mind characterized by peace, an attitude that views life, including all of its ups and downs, with equanimity... Joy allows one to see beyond any particular event to the sovereign Lord who stands above all events.*

Joy and suffering have a deep connection in Christian theology. The letter to the Philippians expresses the seeming paradox that the severe suffering experienced by Paul and the Philippians pales in comparison with the confident Joy they share. Paul says: *But, even if I am poured out as a libation upon the sacrificial service of your faith, I rejoice and share my Joy with all of you.*

(Philippians 2:17). The suffering that Paul talks about is not gratuitous; it must have meaning. Suffering can strengthen our endurance and hope, lead to empathy and compassion for others, and provide witness to the Christian message. Paul tells us that *God has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for Him as well* (Philippians 1:29), and that those who do so will share in His resurrection and glory. It is when we are suffering that we can most expect the Spirit to be with us.

In *The Book of Joy*, based on conversations between good friends Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leaders discern eight components of Joy. Joy is the product of the interactions among these eight qualities.

COMPONENTS of Joy

qualities of <i>mind</i>	qualities of <i>heart</i>
• humility	• forgiveness
• perspective	• gratitude
• humor	• compassion
• acceptance	• generosity



To Ponder and Discuss:

1. Can an atheist experience the equivalent of the Christian conception of Joy?
2. Does Hawthorne's description of Joy as a *settled state of mind characterized by peace* resonate with you? Why or why not?
3. Can you think of a time in your life when you were suffering for Christ?
4. Which of the four qualities of mind do you value most highly?

Final Thought

Both Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama have lived lives where suffering was present, and they came together to share the good news that Joy is available to us all, that generosity will fill us with Joy, and that suffering is an impermanent teacher.

Closing

- What will you take away from today's discussion?
- What questions do you want to explore?
- Closing Prayer



Notes



JOY
IN THE
LORD

ID 114644331 © Sunnyko | Dreamstime.com



Week Two: Unassailable Joy

Main Idea

Both Joy and suffering are characteristic in every life. In the Christian life we are taught that Joy and suffering can actually coexist at the same time. Does that mean we need to suffer to find Joy? And, exactly how do we find Joy in our suffering?

Key Point

Why would anyone in their right mind be Joyful in circumstances of personal loss, financial reversal, and religious discrimination. The Letter to the Hebrews describes such conditions that were endured by the original readers.

Hebrews 10:34

You suffered along with those in prison and Joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

Somehow, even after being stripped of their goods and properties – left penniless and homeless, they did not rise up against the authorities, nor did they even grudgingly accept their lot. They accepted it with Joy!

They knew why they were persecuted because of their belief in Christ and that their “property” and their “wealth” were temporary. They believed that true wealth would await them in the Kingdom of God, and this knowledge gave them authentic and sustaining Joy. For these early Christians, and many poor and oppressed Christians today, it is actually a privilege to suffer on behalf of Christ.

In most of the developed world today it is unlikely that we would be persecuted for Christian beliefs. But what if we chose to downsize our lifestyle – house, cars, no vacation trips, gave away our toys, moved to a more affordable town, and donated the expected savings to charity?

To Ponder and Discuss

1. Would we feel Joyful, and consider our new circumstances a badge of honor?
2. Can you imagine being full of Joy, with the knowledge that these kinds of losses put you in the special company of those who suffer on behalf of Christ?





St. Josephine Bakhita was born 1877, and grew up in the Darfur region of the Sudan, in relative prosperity since her father was the tribal chieftain. At age 8, she was kidnapped, sold into slavery, and suffered terrible treatment at the hands of various masters. In

1884 she was taken to Venice with one of her owners, and temporarily placed with the Canossian Sisters, a local convent. During her time there, she discovered and decided to commit herself to Christ, and was eventually freed from slavery through the appeals of the Sisters. At age 19, she took her final vows and spent the balance of her life at a convent in Schiao, Italy. When asked about her kidnapers and the horrible treatment she endured at the hands of her owners, she offered thanks to them, saying:

If I were to meet the slave-traders who kidnapped me and those who tortured me, I would kneel and kiss their hands, for if that did not happen, I would not be a Christian. The Lord has loved me so much: we must love everyone – we must be compassionate.

St. Josephine endured hardship, but through that, she experienced great Joy through her relationship with God.

To Ponder and Discuss

1. Might St. Josephine have found Christ had she not suffered? Would her faith have been so strong?
2. Under such circumstances, how would you have responded to such treatment? Would you have sought salvation in Christ as Bakhita did, and would you have found Joy?
3. Think of a time when you were asked to forgive a serious transgression. Were you able to forgive, and did you find Joy in that act?

The role of Spirituals

Go Tell it on the Mountain is a well-known hymn that we frequently sing on Christmas, as it tells the birth of Christ, and is sung with spirit and Joy. The song traces its roots to African American slaves, and called a spiritual because it was passed down in an oral tradition by Christian African slaves, brought to the eastern US, to address the hardships of slavery and promise of eternal life.

Several other popular Spirituals have been adopted into mainstream Christianity, such as *He's Got the Whole World in his Hands* and *Lord I want to be a Christian*. *Michael, Row the Boat Ashore* was first recorded by an abolitionist after hearing slaves singing it in South Carolina. These Spirituals and hundreds more continue to inspire Christians today.

- Why do you think people in slavery turned to Jesus? In such dire circumstances, what gave them the strength to sing, and to sing about their faith in God?

While none of us will ever understand the horrors of slavery, one could argue that their songs, and by extension their Christian practices, gave them strength and hope in an otherwise bleak world. It may be that they identified with some of the biblical stories of slavery and deliverance like the story in Exodus, and the story of Joseph. It is no coincidence that both stories were celebrated in Hollywood (*The Ten Commandments*) and Broadway (*Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat*) offering hope to marginalized people and strength to Christians.

Christianity teaches that, contra fatalism, suffering is overwhelming; contra Buddhism, suffering is real; contra karma, suffering is often unfair; but contra secularism, suffering is meaningful. There is a purpose to it, and if faced rightly, it can drive us like a nail deep into the love of God and into more stability and spiritual power than you can imagine.

Tim Keller *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*



To Ponder and Discuss

1. What meaning have you found in the suffering you have endured?
2. What does Keller mean when he writes, *There is purpose to it, if faced rightly?*
3. Does suffering have its own meaning or must we construct meaning in order to make sense of it?

Final Thought

In the movie *The Bucket List*, the two main characters, Edward (played by Jack Nicholson) and Carter (played by Morgan Freeman) are suffering from cancer, and go on a journey around the world, checking off their “bucket list” items. At one point, Carter tells Edward of an Egyptian belief that people are asked before they can get into Heaven....

1. Have you found Joy in your life?
2. Have you brought Joy to others?

Edward, answers “Yes” to the first question but not the second. We learn that he has challenges in his personal life. Towards the end of the film, Edward is struggling so Carter sends him a letter quoting Carter’s Pastor, who says that all lives merge in a river and lead to Heaven. Carter ends the letter with the request to “Find the Joy in your life and let the waters carry you home.” Edward takes certain steps to reconnect with family and can

finally answer “Yes” to the question, “have you brought Joy to others?” The premise is that Edward ultimately found Joy in his life, and brought Joy to others, through the lessons he learned facing his terminal illness.

1. If faced with something terrible like an illness, do you think you would you look for or be able to find Joy?
2. How might we bring Joy to others?

What will you take home from today’s discussion?



Notes





Week 3- Living in Joy

*When you do things from your soul,
you feel a river moving in you, a Joy. — Rumi*

Main Idea

Joy is essential to a Christian life. The Scriptures are very clear on this point: God's people are exhorted to rejoice. Joy is not optional but an essential ingredient. So, the challenge becomes: how to live a life filled with Joy?

Key Point

Joy is an invaluable gift of God that is freely given to us.

We can be so easily caught up in the struggles of daily life. Knowing that not only is Joy possible, but that God is utterly committed to our everlasting Joy in Him can be such a gift to us.

Joy is what happens deep inside your spirit and soul -- a deep abiding. John Piper defines Christian Joy: *Christian Joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the word and in the world.*

Rick Warren's definition of Christian Joy: *Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my*

life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright and the determined choice to praise God in every situation.

We remember the story of Jesus's birth and the hope for a new dawn. We remember significant stories from our past. Just as there is hope infused in the birth of Jesus, we can step away from our past stories and memories and into a future filled with Joy through our belief in Christ. Joy is possible.

Scripture

Deuteronomy 26:11

You shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you...

1 Thessalonians 5:16

Be Joyful always.

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all Joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

John 15:11

These things I have spoken to you, that my Joy may be in you, and that your Joy may be full.

1 Peter 1:8-9

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with Joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Jesus' birth

The wise men knew very little about who Jesus was or even why he came, and yet, the Bible says they are filled with great Joy. So why, with all we know now about Jesus and his teachings, don't we join in this extraordinary Joy? Jesus is God's gift to us. Jesus is our hope of heaven and our promise of peace and Joy through our life on earth.

Matthew 2:10-11

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great Joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.



To Ponder and Discuss

1. How do you define Joy?
2. What is Christian Joy to you?
3. What does it look like to go from past memories to hope and Joy?
4. What does it mean to “Live in Joy”?
5. Is a life filled with Joy even possible?

So how do we discover what brings us Joy? How do we Live in Joy? We each have the power to create Joy in our lives. We each have the power to make active choices on how we want to live our lives. We each have the power to discover our true selves and our true passions.

We do this by slowing down and accessing our own inner wisdom and waiting and listening for the still, calm, sure voice of God. This voice has been available to us all along, just waiting for us to open up and listen to its messages of hope and Joy. Through tapping into your inner calm, courage and creativity you can make a difference in how you live your life. You can choose to live a life filled with Joy!



We will be more successful in all our endeavors if we can let go of the habit of running all the time and take little pauses to relax and re-center ourselves. And we'll also have a lot more Joy in living.

-Thich Nhat Hanh

Final Thought

Slowing down.... The key to a Joy-filled life.

Take a breath, step back from the busyness of life and listen to your heart and listen to God. There is wisdom and love in that quiet calm space. Be open to what arises. Let it settle into your soul. Then choose to step into what will bring you Joy. Joy is possible!

Young people want to live in the future.

Older people want to live in the past.

Nobody wants to live in the present.

And where has Joy placed itself?

Where has understanding placed itself?

In the present.”

– Prem Rawat

To Ponder and Discuss

1. Where can we find lasting Joy?
2. How do I know that God has good, Joy-filled plans for me?
3. What steps will I take to find Joy?
4. How can I live in Joy when there is so much suffering in the world?
5. What does it mean to live in the confident assurance of a present Joy?



Please break up into pairs and discuss the following questions

1. Have your stories of Joy changed as a result of this series?
2. Do you have new stories of Joy to share?
3. What are the common elements?

Closing

- What will you take away from today’s discussion?
- Closing Prayer

*“Every breath we take, every step we make,
can be filled with peace, Joy and serenity.”*

-Thich Nhat Hanh



Notes



2019 Advent Small Groups

Monday Evenings, 7 - 8:30 (12/2, 12/9, 12/16)	Charity Tremblay, Host and Facilitator
Monday Evenings, 7 - 8:30 (12/2, 12/9, 12/16)	Jane Turner-Michael, Facilitator; at church parlor
Tuesday Mornings, 10 - 11:30 (12/3,12/10, 12/17)	Liz Crowell, Facilitator; at church parlor
Wednesday Evenings, 7 - 8:30 (12/4, 12/11, 12/18)	Dave DeLong, Facilitator; Jeff Campbell, Host
Wednesday Evenings, 7 - 8:30 (12/4, 12/11, 12/18)	Hank and Liz Haff, Hosts and Facilitators
Thursday Evenings, 7 - 8:30 (12/5, 12/12, 12/19)	Mary Jane Knudson, Facilitator; Janet Lawson, Host

With great thanks to the CE Committee

Leslie Ackles
Marcia Ackley
Stephen Haas
Janet Lawson
Rick Olney
Polly Vanasse