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Joy

Editorial

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During the first Palestinian Intifada, I was part of a global delegation to the First International Symposium on Palestinian Liberation Theology, held in Jerusalem in 1990 at Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theological Studies. As part of the experience we spent several days in Gaza. We walked the streets and saw bulldozed homes and water barrels with holes in them made by Israeli bullets. We visited hospitals and talked to doctors and nurses as well as people healing from injuries caused by rubber bullets and regular bullets. We visited schools and talked to teachers and students about disruptions of teaching and learning caused by the war. We ate meals and drank tea served by Palestinian hosts in their family tents.

We heard many stories. We also heard expressions of fear and frustration—understandable ones. And we witnessed joy—gentle amusement and robust laughter—as people made jokes, teased, enjoyed each other. This joy I found puzzling. In my naïveté, I wondered: How can this be? How can people know joy amid such incredible adversity? And when I returned to North America, I faced a second puzzle: how to talk about the joy I had witnessed. Too often people responded to my attempts with "Well, it can't be too bad over there, if people are able to make jokes about it." Then I knew that I had failed once more to communicate the significance of what I had seen and heard in Gaza.

This issue of *Vision* on joy is rooted in the questions about joy raised by that time in Gaza all those years ago. I confess: I was anxious about editing an issue on this theme. Unlike other topics we have explored in these pages—worship, confession, sexuality, the Bible, and prayer, for example—joy has no substance that we can pull apart and examine. It is an emotion. It is something we feel or feel the lack of. It may be a Christian virtue, although some would claim that, like happiness, it is more often a by-

product of Christian virtue. And joy is easily trivialized or sentimentalized. The things that lurk in the dark in the middle of the night taunted me with the suggestion that this issue could become *Vision*'s version of a Hallmark card. I will let you, dear reader, make your own assessment. But mine is that our writers have given the lie to those insidious two-in-the-morning voices.

We begin the issue with companion pieces. Chris Marshall's thoughtful essay on why Christian joy matters is followed by Julia Gingrich's reflection on Marshall's presentation, from the perspective of her ministry internship experience in a historic Black church in south-central Elkhart. These two essays provide a framework for reading the rest of the articles, most of which deal more specifically with various aspects of joy.

Janet Elaine Guthrie and Abbot John Klassen write about joy as it permeates a life in leadership—Guthrie from the perspective of a Mennonite pastor and Klassen from the perspective of a Benedictine monk. Jennifer Davis Sensenig and Korey Dyck deepen our understanding of joy by reading texts—in a broad sense. Sensenig reads Acts 16:25–34, bringing to readers her care for the Bible and for the church. Dyck reads history, his own family story and related artifacts, in order to mine insights about joy for us.

The next three articles explore joy from a vocational standpoint. Gilberto Pérez writes about joy out of his experience as a practitioner and teacher of social work. Sarah Thompson contributes thoughts about finding joy in the holy work of making justice. Carol Ann Weaver reflects on her life as a musician and on the relationship between joy and art.

The final contributions in the issue serve as summary and capstone. Anita Yoder Kehr's sermon states beautifully how joy is rooted in love, and how it in turn helps us open ourselves to suffering and sorrow. A letter written to *Vision* readers by the irrepressible Arlo Frech, from his farm straddling the US/Canada border, invites us to the joy of the Lord. Finally, we include the responses of nine *Vision* readers to our invitation to them to tell us about their resources for sustaining joy.

Perhaps I can only, with Arlo, wish you the joy of the Lord as you peruse these lovely and thought-provoking contributions.

Joy, the energy of present redemption

Chris Marshall

In the well-known passage at the beginning of Hebrews 12, where the author urges his readers to "run with perseverance the race set before you, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith," there is a curious and somewhat elusive reference to joy. At first blush, it seems oddly out of place in a passage dominated by sin, shame, and suffering. Locked in a desperate "struggle against sin"—most likely, the temptation to abandon their Christian faith because of persecution—the Hebrews are encouraged to "consider" the hostility Jesus endured from sinners against himself and to look to him as the paradigm and enabler of faithful discipleship. He is the one "who for the sake of (*anti*) the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God" (Heb. 12:1–4).[1]

The Passion was flanked by Jesus' prior experience of relational joy and his subsequent experience of victorious joy—while the deepest suffering of the event itself was the complete deprivation of the divine joy he had known.

The reference to joy is elusive because the force of the Greek prepositional construction *anti*, translated "for the sake of" in the NRSV, is ambiguous. The statement could either mean that Jesus endured the cross "so as to obtain" the joy of heavenly glory, or that he embraced the cross "in place of" or "instead of" the joy he currently experienced in his earthly life. In the former case, the author is suggesting that what gave Jesus the strength to withstand abuse and torment was the anticipation of future joy in heaven. In the latter case, the implication is that Jesus willingly gave up the joy he presently knew in his relationship with God and with others in order to plumb the joylessness of grief and abandonment in the events of crucifixion and death.

The Greek text may be legitimately construed either way, though the second option is perhaps most likely. But the gram-

matical point is entirely academic because both meanings were true of Jesus' actual experience. It is clear that Jesus knew deep joy in his day-to-day relationship with God as his Father (Matt. 11:25–30, cf. Heb. 1:5–6), a joy he freely exchanged for the desolation of the cross, with its climactic cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34; cf. Heb. 5:7–10). This joy, however, was later restored to him on the far side of the valley of suffering and death, flowing both from the renewed intimacy of "sitting forever at God's right hand" (Heb. 1:13; 12:1) and from seeing "many children brought to glory" (Heb. 2:10) as a result of his saving work.

The Passion event, in other words, was flanked by Jesus' experience of joy—his prior experience of relational joy and his subsequent experience of victorious joy—while the deepest suffering of the event itself was not the "hostility he endured from sinners" but the complete deprivation of the divine joy he had hitherto known.

The originality of Christian joy

A few years ago I was invited to speak on the theme of finding joy in difficult circumstances at a conference of the Christian Medical Fellowship in New Zealand. When I began preparing my talks, my mind went back to something I had recently read in a book I had picked up in a secondhand bookshop. The book, entitled *The Originality of the Christian Message*, was written by the Scottish theologian H. R. Mackintosh.[2] It was based on a series of lectures Mackintosh had delivered in America just after World War I on how Christianity is unique or distinctive or "original" among the religions of the world. It is not the kind of book modern scholars would dare to write, with its bold assertions of the uniqueness and superiority of Christian truth. But that is what made it such an interesting read.

The book focuses primarily on what set earliest Christianity apart from other religious and philosophical movements in the first-century Greco-Roman world. Mackintosh proposes that one of the most distinctive features of the early Christian movement was its message of redemption as a *present experience*. It was not just the assertion of bodily life beyond the grave that made Christianity different; it was also its emphasis on salvation as a

presently available experience of moral, spiritual, and emotional transformation, an experience of what Mackintosh calls "present blessedness," the blessedness of union with God in Christ, even here and now.

We all know that in accounting for this experience, the New Testament writers place an overriding emphasis on the role of *faith*. It is by faith that believers are united with Christ in his death and resurrection, find deliverance from the guilt and power of sin, and are empowered to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Faith is the key. But Mackintosh draws attention, almost in passing, to something else in the New Testament's descriptions of present redemption—namely, the role of *joy*.

An emphasis on joy and rejoicing in the Christian community was highly unusual in the religious environment of the first-century Greco-Roman world, which was marked by a pervading sense of pessimism and fear.

The first-century Greco-Roman world, he explains, was marked by a pervading sense of darkness, pessimism, superstition, and fear. Cruelty and bloodshed were everywhere. By contrast, the New Testament is "the most obviously exultant book that has ever been written."[3] The spirit of this literature is encapsulated in Paul's thrice-repeated injunction to the Philippians, "Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. . . . Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice (Phil. 3:1; 4:4). Such an emphasis on joy and rejoicing in the Christian community was highly unusual in the religious environment of the time. Mackintosh is worth quoting in full:

> *Students of first-century literature need not be told that this distinctively Christian gladness, or glad fearlessness, which breaks across life like a flushing dawn, was a strange new thing. Such joy unspeakable and full of glory is not found in other faiths. Jesus somehow was able to give men the courage to believe themselves redeemed . . . not merely by speaking to them about the Father but by revealing in his own life the security and gladness which flow from trustful obedience to the Father's love. As Matthew Arnold said, "It is the gladness of Christianity which has made its fortune, and not its sorrow." . . . Alone in the religions of the world, it dared to say, "Rejoice evermore." This is a fact so distinctive that some*

> *thinkers have actually defined the method of Christianity as "salvation by joy." . . . The joy in God generated by the fact of Christ was a new phenomenon in religious history, and one charged with boundless significance for the creation of living and victorious morality.*[4]

Reasons for joy

If we were to ask where this early Christian experience of irrepressible joy came from, the answer, it seems to me, is to be found in four interrelated places.

The first source of joy was the unshakeable belief the first believers had in the *bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead*, an event that proved beyond all question he had secured a definitive victory over the powers of death and evil. This belief generated immense hope for the future and an intrepid fearlessness in the present. "Death has been swallowed up in victory," Paul exults: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:53–56).

A second source of Christian joy was the awareness of having received a *radical forgiveness of sins and deliverance from the compulsions of sin* or the "power of sin" (Rom. 3:9). This is what enabled them to walk in a "newness of life," a newness characterized by a profound sense of liberty and lightness. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. . . . To set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom. 8:1–4).

The third reason for joy was the experience of *belonging to a new social community*, the body of Christ, a new kind of society in which "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). Membership in this community brought a feeling of mutual solidarity and support (Gal. 6:2), as well as a newfound sense of dignity and equality that cut across all the deepest social divisions of the day.

The fourth and most important source of early Christian joy was the *indwelling and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit* in their

midst. This was not a matter of abstract doctrine; it was a matter of tangible experience, an experience, it seems, of being immersed in liquid love. That is why Paul can say that "God's love has been *poured* into our hearts"—like molten fire—"through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5). Over and over again in the New Testament, the experience of joy is attributed to the Holy Spirit, sent like a flood upon the young community (e.g., Rom. 14:17; 15:13; Gal. 5:22).

It was these four interconnected realities, then, that generated this effervescent, contagious joy that distinguished the early Christian movement. That doesn't mean Christians exercised a monopoly on joy. All people have the capacity to know profound joy, irrespective of religious or philosophical commitment, as a result of being made in God's image. It is a manifestation of God's common grace.

Christian joy is joy on steroids, injected with confidence in Christ's triumph over evil, knowledge of forgiveness of sins and freedom from moral defeat, membership in a loving community, and immersion in the pulsating life and power of God's Spirit.

But while joy is not unique to Christians, there is still something unique about Christian joy. You might say that *Christian joy is human joy on steroids*, with the steroidal injection comprising the four realities just described—a confidence in Christ's triumph over death and the forces of evil; the knowledge of personal forgiveness of sins and freedom from moral defeat; membership in a loving community of worship, equality, and support; and, most importantly, immersion in the pulsating life and power of God's Spirit.

But wait! There's more

Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of this steroidal Christian joy was its capacity to coexist with suffering and distress. This is truly remarkable. The New Testament writers repeatedly speak of joy and suffering as simultaneous realities. They are not mutually exclusive. They don't cancel each other out. Instead they run on a kind of divided highway, existing side by side at the same time.

This coexistence is attested everywhere in the New Testament. "We want you to know, brothers and sisters," Paul writes to the

Corinthians, "about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy . . . overflowed in a wealth of generosity" (2 Cor. 8:1–2). He reminds the Thessalonians of how "in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:6). The writer of James goes so far as to suggest that "whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy" (James 1:2).

The sorrow is still sorrow. The pain is real; it still hurts. It is never denied, or repressed, or trivialized. And yet paradoxically—even miraculously—suffering is accompanied by an inextinguishable joy.

These texts all speak of joy in the time of trial, joy in the midst of sorrow. The sorrow is still sorrow. The pain is real; it still hurts. It is never denied, or repressed, or trivialized. And yet paradoxically—even miraculously—suffering is accompanied by a tenacious, inextinguishable joy. This distinctively Christian blend of severe suffering and joyful buoyancy is most eloquently described in 2 Corinthians 4.

> *For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*
>
> *But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. (2 Cor. 4:1–11, cf. Rom 8:36–39)*

No wonder, then, that just as the New Testament speaks of the Christian experience of peace as something that "surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:7), so it speaks of the Christian experience of joy as beyond description and full of glory (1 Peter 1:18).

Jesus on joy

When we turn to the Gospel accounts, we find that joy was a recurring theme in the teaching, activity, and experience of Jesus as well. He was frequently found at the table of tax collectors and

sinners, celebrating with them their inclusion in God's renewing and restoring work (Mark 2:15–17; Matt. 11:18–19; Luke 7:31–33; 19:5–10).

The disciples were beneficiaries of this reality too. Luke reports that when the seventy returned from their preaching mission, they "returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' " Jesus responded by explaining that they had been given access to his own unique authority over spiritual evil, but he told them not to rejoice in their power but rather to "rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Then, addressing God in prayer, Jesus himself "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit," marveling at how the Father had drawn such marginal and insignificant people into the orbit of his saving revelation. Turning to the disciples, he pronounced the beatitude "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see" and "hear what you hear" (Luke 10:17–25).

The disciples' joy comes from being caught up in the "present blessedness" of God's saving rule, a joy that persists in the face of pain, persecution, and social exclusion. It is the same joy that fuels the social radicalism of God's rule.

In the earlier list of beatitudes in Luke addressed to the disciples there is a further reference to joy, in this case the paradoxical joy in suffering just described. "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets" (Luke 6:22–23; cf. Matt. 5:12–13).

In both cases, the disciples' joy comes from being caught up in the "present blessedness" of God's saving rule, a joy that persists in the face of pain, persecution, and social exclusion. It is the same joy that fuels the social radicalism of God's rule. In the parable of the buried treasure, Jesus likens encountering the kingdom of God to discovering "treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid, then *in his joy* he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matt. 13:44). Discovering God's saving activity in Jesus elicits great joy, and this joy impels a radical change of lifestyle. The man *sold* all he possessed and he *bought* the pearl of great price. He disinvested in the world as he knew it and reinvested his entire life in the agenda of God's new order.

The energy of God's kingdom

In his proclamation and instruction on the kingdom of God, Jesus consistently called for an ethical response from his hearers. In a word, he called for repentance and faith (Mark 1:14–15), and repentance in the biblical tradition entails a conscious refocusing of one's values, priorities, allegiances, and patterns of conduct.

The repentance Jesus demanded was far-reaching in nature. In his ethical teaching, he targeted four fundamental areas of human existence—the area of wealth and possessions (the realm of economic power); the area of status, privilege, and prejudice (the sphere of social power); the issue of violence and attitude toward enemies (the arena of coercive power); and the area of religious and ritual performance (the domain of spiritual power). Responding to God's kingdom requires major transformations in each of these areas.

The moral and personal transformation Jesus called for is not the product of heroic self-discipline, or cold moralism, or doctrinaire legalism, or ideological purism. It is the product of joy—the joy of discovery, the joy of grace, the joy of finding something extraordinary and receiving it as a gift.

Jesus' demands were nothing if not radical. But the moral and personal transformation he called for is not the product of heroic self-discipline, or cold moralism, or doctrinaire legalism, or ideological purism—all of which are common in society and equally prevalent in the church. It is the product of joy—the joy of discovery, the joy of grace, the joy of finding something extraordinary and receiving it as a gift. *Joy is the energy of God's kingdom*. The motivation for commitment to the transformational agenda of God's kingdom is the joy of being connected to Jesus and filled with his Spirit.

Of course joy does not do the whole job. It must be complemented by self-discipline, courage, and hard work. Discipleship is difficult, as Anabaptists are fond of stressing, and rightly so. Jesus constantly warned his hearers that following him would involve hardship, persecution, and suffering. There is a cost to discipleship, just as there was a cost to messiahship for Jesus, and it is a cost we must freely and repeatedly choose to embrace.

But when we do—when we sell our investment in the world as it is and buy property in God's new order—we get a free promotional gift along with our purchase. We get joy, the joy of being

joined with Jesus and his people and filled with his Spirit. It is a joy capable of sustaining us through the darkest of times because it is constantly replenished by the love of God "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5).

Notes

[1] Scripture quotations are from the NRSV.
[2] H. R. Mackintosh, *The Originality of the Christian Message*, Studies in Theology (London: Duckworth & Co., 1920).
[3] Ibid., 116.
[4] Ibid.

About the author

Chris Marshall was recently appointed as the inaugural Professor of Restorative Justice in the School of Government at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. His most recent book, *Compassionate Justice: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, was published in 2012. This article is based on an address he gave to a chapel service at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, on March 12, 2013.

My conversion to joy

Julia Gingrich

"*This is the day that the Lord has made; let* us *rejoice and be glad in it*" (Ps. 118:24). During the summer of 2013, I had the privilege of interning at St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church in Elkhart, Indiana, a church where these words are frequently uttered from the pulpit as an invitation to joyfully worship the God of life. The worship culture of St. James is profoundly marked by an attitude of joy and praise. "*Thank you, Lord, that we have seen another day*" is a common prayer in this congregation which is located in a marginalized urban community. There is deep joy and heartfelt gratitude simply to be alive. Through my ministry experience at St. James, I discovered that cultivating a culture of joy empowers congregations to participate in God's mission of sustaining life in a world of death.

My ministry experience at St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church taught me that cultivating a culture of joy empowers congregations to participate in God's mission of sustaining life in a world of death.

I began contemplating the role of joy in Christian discipleship several months before my internship began, when Chris Marshall preached a sermon on this subject at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, where I was studying.[1] Prior to hearing his sermon, I had given little consideration to a theology of joy for the mission of the church. I struggled with joy. For me, mournful prayers of lament and intercession always flowed more easily than joyful prayers of praise and thanksgiving. I tended to focus my spiritual gaze on all that is unhealed and unjust in our world. Part of my difficulty with joy related to an underlying fear of being perceived as naïve, insensitive, or out of touch with what's really happening. Hence my pattern of succumbing to the old "How can we be joyful and praise God for this beautiful day when there is a civil war going on in Syria?" syndrome.

It was Chris Marshall's sermon that compelled me to give joy a second chance—to cease dismissing it as a naïve and trivial component of Christian spirituality, and begin marveling at its distinctive capacity to coexist with suffering and pain. Through this sermon the Spirit invited me to receive God's gift of tenacious joy, a gift that empowers us to live hopefully in a world rife with struggle and oppression of all kinds.

Out of fear of being perceived as naïve, insensitive, or out of touch with what's really happening, I tended to succumb to the old "How can we be joyful and praise God for this beautiful day when there is a civil war going on in Syria?" syndrome.

Several months after this initial awakening to joy, I began my internship at St. James. There I was embraced by a community of faith that accompanied me on a deep conversion to joy, to praise, and to thanksgiving. The saints of St. James became my teachers of joy. In *Then Shall Your Light Rise: Spiritual Formation and Social Witness*, Joyce Hollyday writes about the necessity of joy for building God's kingdom of peace and justice. She encourages Christians of privileged social locations to move toward the margins in order to learn about authentic and persistent joy from God's people who are struggling for life.

> *Just as people with the least are often the most grateful and generous, I have found that people who suffer most are often the most joyful—another irony of faithfulness. Their joy is something wholly other than the shallow happiness that the world offers. It comes not from trying to avoid pain by accruing comforts but rather from moving deeply into the world's pain and finding reasons to rejoice in the midst of embracing what is difficult. It is the joy of resurrection, known only by passing through crucifixion.*[2]

I am deeply grateful for the way God extended the gift of joy to me through the St. James family of faith. Drawing on Chris Marshall's work, I will now highlight how I witnessed this congregation embodying the life-sustaining joy of the gospel in their worship, fellowship, and mission.

The joy of resurrection faith

Chris Marshall identifies four interconnected realities that generate Christian joy. One source of joy is belief in Jesus' resurrection and victory over the powers of death and evil. Interning at an African American church during a time when significant court cases were playing out—such as the gutting of the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the acquittal of George Zimmerman in his killing of Trayvon Martin—opened my eyes to the vital role that *resurrection faith* plays in empowering those who experience oppression to remain hopeful amid the crushing blows of interpersonal and systemic violence.

On the Sunday morning immediately following George Zimmerman's acquittal, Rev. Jennifer Tinsley opened the worship service with a prayer that attended to the pain, anger, and fear felt by members of the congregation who are vulnerable to the dehumanizing and deadly forms of racial profiling that tragically claimed Trayvon's Martin's life. Holding the pain of her people, Rev. Tinsley dared to assert the congregation's belief in Jesus' definitive victory over the unjust structures of our world. She opened the prayer with this confession of faith: "*God, we know you to be the reigning God of justice*."

In the days following the not-guilty verdict I read an article by Drew Hart, a theologian who brings together black theology and Anabaptism, that further revealed to me how resurrection faith emboldens God's people to persistently struggle for a more just society. Writing to all those grieved by the miscarriage of justice in the Trayvon Martin case, Hart offered words of comfort that are worth quoting at length:

> *For those that are hurting and struggling today, here is some pain medicine. God . . . continues to hear the cries of the oppressed and violated. God took on human flesh so that he once and for all could overcome the death-dealing and sinful forces that oppress and do violence to the poor, oppressed, and vulnerable . . .*
>
> *Jesus conquered death and the cross through resurrection. And God invites us to be part of his Resurrection world that overcomes the violence and oppression of this current world and to participate in the world to come, where the*

vulnerability of young men like Trayvon (and our loved ones) will no longer happen.

And so, as we struggle today, let's not struggle in despair, but in a hope for what is to come. A hope that stirs deep in our souls as we struggle for justice and peace with our backs straight and our heads lifted high, because God is with us and will vindicate us, no matter what the courts rule, the laws enforce, or how people respond. Today, we proclaim that Jesus our liberator, in solidarity with us, reigns and is victoriously marching us towards Zion.[3]

The St. James community of faith showed me that resurrection faith makes it possible for us to live hopefully and courageously in a culture that is bent on violence and destruction. When the world gives out, our energy is depleted, and injustice is all around, we are lifted into the arms of God who has secured the victory of love and life over violence and death. And that is cause for joy—life-sustaining joy that is "beyond description and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:18).[4]

The joy of discovering grace

Chris Marshall identifies a second source of Christian joy as the discovery of grace—the awareness of having received a radical forgiveness of sins and freedom from the sinful systems of our world. At St. James, people come to worship *needing* and *expecting* to be touched by the saving power of God. They come ready to fall on their knees at the altar and offer up their broken hearts and wounded lives to God. In assuming this posture of utter dependency, they open themselves to receive the outpouring of grace that flows from the heart of God.

As I joined the congregation in kneeling at the altar to confess my brokenness, I discovered that discipleship is first and foremost about receiving the gift of Jesus.

Through worshiping at St. James, my Anabaptist understanding of discipleship, with its heavy emphasis on ethical living, underwent a conversion. As I joined the congregation in kneeling at the altar to confess my brokenness, I discovered that discipleship is first and foremost about receiving the gift of Jesus—receiving the gift of forgiveness that empowers

us to walk in a "newness of life." Seeing Jesus first as gift *for us*, and then as a model for the life of faith, brings us to a place of thankfulness that cannot but result in joyful celebration. St. James taught me that our restoration is not complete until some spirited rejoicing gets underway—until we sing, clap, and dance in praise of the God who saves us. I am immensely grateful for the way this life-celebrating community of faith helped me shake loose and surrender my body and soul to the joy of being connected to Jesus and caught up in God's grace.

The joy of belonging to a new community

A third source of joy that Chris Marshall highlights is the experience of belonging to a new family of faith where we are drawn into relationships of support and solidarity that bridge the social divides of our culture. St. James practices Christ-like hospitality by welcoming members and visitors with a warmth and enthusiasm that fosters a joyful sense of belonging. They are especially intentional about embracing those who are enduring the isolating pain of abuse, addiction, homelessness, and incarceration. All those who walk through the doors of St. James are invited into a fellowship of faith where the life of each person is honored and joyfully affirmed: "*Welcome to Saint James, where everybody is somebody*!"

On my very first Sunday at St. James, the congregation affirmed my presence among them by giving me a standing ovation. I was deeply touched by this gracious expression of welcome that was extended to me before I did anything—before I had the chance to demonstrate my pastoral skills and prove myself as a ministering person. I was lovingly welcomed for simply being who I am: a daughter of God, a sister in Christ. On my last Sunday at St. James, Rev. Tinsley laid her hand on my shoulder and offered a prayer which included these words: "*God, we thank that through Julia's presence here with us, we have been reminded that in Christ, there is no longer Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free, black nor white*." This prayer abides with me, persistently reminding me of the relational joy that enlivens the body of Christ when we embrace risky opportunities to love across differences in order to see the Spirit tear down the dividing walls of hostility.

The joy of the sweet Holy Spirit

The fourth source of Christian joy that Chris Marshall elevates is the experience of being immersed in the presence of the Holy Spirit who pours God's love into our hearts. Over the course of my internship at St. James, joy took up residence in my heart as I grew ever more aware of the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in my own life and in the lives of others. One way this happened was by singing "There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place," a song by Doris Akers that attunes our souls to the gracious movements of the Holy Spirit in our midst. "*Sweet Holy Spirit, sweet heavenly Dove, stay right here with us, filling us with your love*." Worship begins by calling on the "*sweet heavenly Dove*" to hover over us and fill us with a love that heals, a love that comforts, a love that revives and empowers us to live in the strength and fullness of our calling. When the Holy Spirit pours this kind of love into our hearts, the joy stirring within us is made visible through the "*sweet expressions on each face*."

Joy—the energy of God's kingdom

I am profoundly grateful for all the ways that St. James helped me to discover that, in the words of Chris Marshall, "Joy is the energy of God's kingdom." It is joy that generates the kingdom-seeking energy we need in order to be healthy and vibrant communities of faith that sustain life in a culture of death. Again, Joyce Hollyday reminds us of the importance of seeking out teachers of joy as we engage the hard work of building God's kingdom of peace and justice:

> *Living as we do in a world that suffers so much, two opposing possibilities can easily tempt us: either to turn our backs and live oblivious to the pain or to allow the pain to overwhelm us and despair to take up residence in our hearts. The truly faithful option is to face the pain and live joyfully in the midst of it. Those who suffer most remind us of how tragic and arrogant it would be for us to lose hope on behalf of people who have not lost theirs. They are teachers of joy.*[5]

The saints of St. James are my teachers of joy. They continually remind me that discipleship involves both following Jesus into the

pain of our current world and following Jesus into the joy of God's new resurrection world. When we stay connected to the Jesus of the cross and the Jesus of the resurrection, we are empowered to embody the gospel hopefully, courageously, and *joyfully* in a world that desperately needs it.

Notes

[1] See Chris Marshall's sermon, "Joy, the Energy of Present Redemption," in this issue.
[2] Joyce Hollyday, *Then Shall Your Light Rise: Spiritual Formation and Social Witness* (Upper Room Books: Nashville, 1997), 93–94.
[3] Drew Hart, "Pain Medicine: Trayvon, Simon of Cyrene, and Jesus," *drewgihart.com/* (blog), June 15, 2013, http://drewgihart.com/2013/07/15/pain-medicine-trayvon-simon-of-cyrene-and-jesus/.
[4] Hollyday, *Then Shall Your Light Rise*, 95.
[5] Ibid.

About the author

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Wages of joy

Janet Elaine Guthrie

A decade ago, when I was in the midst of a significant life transition, a dear friend introduced me to Mary Oliver's poem "The Summer Day." What I had given myself to for thirty years, both professionally through a career in higher education and personally in my marriage, was coming to an end. Seminary studies had not yet crystallized as the country I would next inhabit.

In that threshold time, the challenging question with which Oliver ends her poem grabbed my imagination, gifting me with spacious wonder: "*Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?*"[1]

What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? The question grants that human experience is unique and valuable; each of us has but one life, and each life has precious worth. At the same time, human experience is wild, part of nature, fueled by passionate energy, and filled with surprises. How does one plan with wildness in the mix? For Mary Oliver, the approach involves an embodied openness to the present moment.

Each of us has but one life, and each life has precious worth. At the same time, human experience is wild, part of nature, fueled by passionate energy, and filled with surprises. How does one plan with wildness in the mix?

Indeed, the poet is spending a summer day outdoors, reveling in the marvels of creation. A grasshopper hops up and eats from her hand. She notices the grasshopper's features and deliberate movements: how the grasshopper moves her jaws and gazes around . . . now lifts her pale forearms . . . now washes her face . . . now snaps her wings open . . . and floats away.

Paying attention to this other creature leads the poet to declare her own posture of presence: "I do know how to pay

attention, how to fall down / into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass, / how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields, / which is what I have been doing all day." The present moment holds the key. Oliver claims the blessing of seeing, movement, contact with the earth, and reverence for life. Her gratitude flows from delight in the here and now. This is the foundational place of joyful awareness from which to welcome one's vocation or purpose in life.

What will make your heart sing?

Mary Oliver's question encouraged my turning aside from the known path with its markers of prestige and material success. As I opened myself to the richness of *being*, I asked where my longing pointed, where joy was to be found. Gradually, and in answer to prayer, the new path emerged, leading me to seminary and then to a pastoral call.

Having found a calling, whether vocation or avocation, we face an ongoing need to name and claim the heart of our joy. A second compelling question has guided me in doing so: *What will make your heart sing?* This is the question posed by the Lilly Endowment to the applicants for its Clergy Renewal Program. To sit with this question in the context of stressful pastoral care, continuous worship planning, and myriad administrative details is inherently liberating. The "should" of pressing tasks, neglected household chores, and self-improvement options falls away.

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The singing heart signifies embodied joy. Cultivating joy that engages our person-specific delight is a worthy spiritual task for any ministering person who seeks to reflect the light of God.

Celtic spirituality emphasizes the goodness of creation and the development of our God-given nature as the path of grace.[2] Sometimes this is referred to as original blessing. In a similar vein, Mark Nepo invites us to uncover at the center of our being the "umbilical spot of grace where we were each first touched by God." Nepo suggests identifying two things we love doing, meditating on what

it is in each that makes us feel alive, and asking what they have in common.[3] Another telling exercise, shared with me by a friend, is to call up our ten-year-old self and recall the channels for joy that defined us prior to adolescent angst and adult social roles.

A joyful commitment to travel on foot

What will make your heart sing? has proven a valuable question to circle around, as time passes, self-discovery deepens, and I find the way home to myself. For the Lilly-funded sabbatical, my answer focused on walking pilgrimage in beautiful landscapes and encounters with my ancestral homelands in the British Isles.[4] Wonderfully, walking is a spiritual practice that claimed me, though I could not have articulated this until midlife. Having suffered a mild bout of polio as a toddler, I find that my enjoyment of walking carries with it a deeply held experience of divine grace.

In recent years, much has been written about walking as a spiritual discipline, from the confined parameters of the labyrinth to the expansive challenge of the Camino de Santiago. In our fast-paced, whiz-by world, an alternative pace of three or four miles an hour allows for close observance of one's surroundings, while one is physically in touch with the elements of nature and nurtured by the meditative rhythm of the walking stride. At the end of my sabbatical, I compiled an explicit rule of life for myself and made a joyful commitment to travel on foot whenever feasible.

Rediscovering the transcendent joy of dancing

Post-sabbatical, with my body more rested and attuned to rhythms of delight, it seemed a natural next step to rediscover the transcendent joy of dancing. I remembered myself as a ten-year-old girl dancing the part of the Sugar Plum Fairy behind my closed bedroom door. I recalled my sharp disappointment when my parents ruled out dance lessons because of their cost. Now the lively Irish, Scottish, and American tunes played by accomplished musicians beckoned, and I joined the welcoming local community of country dancers and took up contra dancing. Here was deep joy indeed: a flow of movement in sync with the music and line of dancers, stepping and twirling and addressing one another with

broad smiles, present to the moment, fully engaged as part of a larger whole. A good contra dancer not only enjoys the dance tremendously, but also, as Greg Rohde notes, "increases the joy of everyone else in the line."[5]

A Lutheran pastor who has found great delight in contra dancing wrote a blog some years back, on the subject "Why Can't Churches Be More Like Contra-Dances?" She observes, "The goal of contra-dancing seems to be experiencing joy in community. And, sometimes along the way, there are these transcendent moments when the music is humming and all the feet are stomping at the same time and the bodies are flowing. Together we have created a thing of beauty. I like to believe it's pleasing to God. And that makes it worship."[6]

Here was deep joy indeed: a flow of movement in sync with the music and line of dancers, stepping and twirling and addressing one another with broad smiles, present to the moment, fully engaged as part of a larger whole.

I am not the only Mennonite in our community who is a dance regular, but my being a pastor has piqued the interest of other dancers. Not infrequently, questions about theology come my way during the break between sets. Still, the most important witness I make is the joy I show. Joy is attractive, just as laughter is infectious. To express joy in the midst of the world's suffering reveals our capacity to hope and to trust in God. Poet and environmentalist farmer Wendell Berry puts it thus: "Expect the end of the world. Laugh. / Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful / though you have considered all the facts."[7]

Dancing and walking are two visible modes by which I intentionally cultivate and share embodied joy in this season of my life. Clarity around my personal joy, freely shared with the congregation and in other circles, has in turn enhanced my pastoral identity and work.

Watching for signs of resurrection on the heels of tragedy

My own journey and the healing work I have done (imperfectly and still in progress) model a healthy trajectory, although they do not, of course, provide a template for others. Henri Nouwen says it well in *The Wounded Healer*: "When we are not afraid to enter our own center and to concentrate on the stirrings of our own

soul, we come to know that being alive means being loved. . . . When we have found the anchor places for our lives in our own center, we can be free to let others enter into the space created for them and allow them to dance their own dance, sing their own song and speak their own language without fear."[8]

As spiritual director and pastoral caregiver, I encourage others to explore and name their sources of joy. I watch for the signs of resurrection on the heels of tragedy. I encourage play and rest as first steps toward healing. Here are three brief case studies:

An adult burdened with mental illness had no outlets for play. To create some order in this person's life seemed a daunting if not hopeless task. When the person articulated a seemingly wild desire to undertake an outdoor adventure, initial reactions included horror and dismay. Yet others saw the adventure as a possible avenue to birth joy and confidence, which is indeed what happened. The mental illness remained, but could be held differently by all parties, in the context of realized joy.

As spiritual director and pastoral caregiver, I encourage others to explore and name their sources of joy. I watch for the signs of resurrection on the heels of tragedy. I encourage play and rest as first steps toward healing.

The matriarch of a troubled and dysfunctional family began coming to our dances. She explained that it was time to inject some fun in her life. After several months of dancing, she initiated a conversation with me, asking for my listening ear and guidance. In the context of the joy she was claiming, she had gathered the strength to face the family problems along with the resolve to do her part to improve relationships.

Another woman perceived that a vocational transition was on the horizon. In paying careful attention to the contours of her childhood joys, she noticed several themes that matched up beautifully with skills she had honed in her current job. Although initially reluctant to pursue the gritty street ministry toward which God seemed to be directing her, she discovered that claiming these core passions eased her concerns and readied her for robust discernment around specific next steps.

Claiming joy honors God's desire for us as beloved children. Claiming joy is faithful to Jesus' instructions that we are to abide in love and friendship and know his joy. Claiming joy gives space

for the Spirit to work and our pain to be transformed, just as the anguish of a woman's labor fades "because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world" (John 16:21).

Pastors are called to be present to whatever sorrows and joys are before us. Last week, I officiated on Monday at a cremation service for a sixty-year-old suicide victim and on Saturday at the wedding of two thirty-year-olds. To be present and attentive to each person and each situation requires that my own heart be open and unafraid.

While at seminary, I read an article about pastoral ministry as an improvisatory art; it spoke to me about the many and varied demands faced by pastors, for which no specific protocol can be learned. Rebecca Slough includes the following in her discussion of the desirable pastoral portfolio:

> *Pastors in training must cultivate a capacity to act playfully, spontaneously, freely, creatively, seriously, compassionately. They need to learn to pray without ceasing. They need to hone their skills in reflecting on past actions, assessing responses, determining fitting choices, and cleaning up mistakes. Developing these skills allows pastors to bring the fullness of themselves as thinking, feeling, intuitive, physical, and spiritual beings to each moment of ministry.*[9]

To bring the fullness of who we are and to enter into things fully: these abilities are tied directly to our capacity for joy. Mark Nepo tells the story of a rainy day at a lake. He and his friend sat in the screened-in porch, watching the rain fall, moping about the weather. Suddenly, the friend "bounded up, slapped the screen door open, tracked his clothes, and jumped into the rain-filled lake." Mark watched, then shed his clothes, too, and jumped in: "There we were: in the center of the lake, water from above in our mouths, in our eyes, pelting us, water entering water, lives entering their living. Each pelt of rain, on us and in the lake, uttering . . . joy, joy, joy."[10]

Immersed, naked to the elements, recasting as blessing what seemed a dreary reality, the two friends seized the moment to abandon themselves to life, in all its wild and precious ways, on this one particular and memorable day.

Thus to know the importance of joy. Thus to be fully present to the moments of our days. Thus to hear hearts singing, ours and those of our loved ones. Thus to encourage others to dive into the rain-filled lake and be blessed. Thus to give birth to peace and joy and thus, as pastors, to receive our wages of joy.

Notes

[1] Mary Oliver, "The Summer Day," *New and Selected Poems* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 94.
[2] See for example, J. Philip Newell, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), chapter 3.
[3] Mark Nepo, *The Book of Awakening: Having the Life You Want by Being Present to the Life You Have* (San Francisco: Conari Press, 2000), January 3 entry, 3–4.
[4] Clergy renewal grant "Jubilee Joy" awarded to First Mennonite Church of Champaign-Urbana by the Lilly Endowment in 2011 for summer 2012 project activities.
[5] Greg Rohde, "Hands Four," *The Commonspace: Grassroots Civics and Culture in St. Louis*, June 2002, http://www.thecommonspace.org/2002/06/games.php.
[6] Nancy Kraft, "Why Can't Churches Be More Like Contra-Dances," *Inside Nancy's Noodle* (blog), Wednesday, November 4, 2009, http://insidenancysnoodle.blogspot.com/2009/11.
[7] Wendell Berry, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front," *The Country of Marriage* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973); reprinted in *New Collected Poems* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2012), 173–74.
[8] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 91–92.
[9] Rebecca Slough, "Pastoral Ministry as Improvisatory Art," in *The Heart of the Matter: Pastoral Ministry in Anabaptist Perspective*, ed. Erick Sawatzky (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004), 195.
[10] Nepo, *The Book of Awakening*, June 27 entry, 211–12.

About the author

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Leadership and joy
Insights from the Rule of Saint Benedict

Abbot John Klassen, OSB

I have lived monastic life as a Benedictine monk since 1971 and have served the community as abbot for fourteen years, so it is natural for me to write about leadership from that context, paying attention to the transferability of these observations to other environments. I will situate my discussion of leadership and joy in a Christian theological framework.

To the extent that we are able to see, recognize, and trust this saving pattern and action—the mystery of Jesus Christ's dying and rising—in our lives, we live in the joy of the Holy Spirit and in the other gifts of the Spirit.

For Christian people, joy is a gift, a fruit of the Holy Spirit. To speak of joy is to acknowledge the universe created by a Trinitarian God. The Spirit breathes on the waters of a formless void, and the creative word is spoken to unfold the heavens and the earth, making a place for humankind.

We experience joy as we discover the incredible sophistication and balance that is present in complex ecosystems. In the midst of the violence and randomness that are present in the unleashing of powerful physical events such as tsunamis, earthquakes, and tornadoes, the universe has within it the healing, renewing power of the Holy Spirit; new life is always emerging.

The Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ draws us into his dying and rising and provides a powerful theological framework for understanding and internalizing this mystery in our own lives. At the Vigil of Easter, we sing, proclaim, and exult with joy in this holy mystery. To the extent that we are able to see, recognize, and trust this saving pattern and action in our lives, we live in the joy of the Holy Spirit, and in all of the other gifts of the Spirit. Saint Paul is clear about this: the ultimate "proof" of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believing community (Rom. 8:9–11).

We experience joy because of our belief in the good news, because with Saint Paul we are always sharing in the dying and rising of Jesus (2 Cor 4:7–11). The battle has been fought, and it was won! This does not mean that we are happy all the time, that the tragic events of our time do not fill us with sadness. Those events might include the senseless killing in Newtown, Connecticut; the loss of dear family members or friends; or our seeming inability as a species to find nonviolent ways toward peace. Joy is not a psychological trick that allows us to fly at 20,000 feet, above the pain and suffering of our world. Joy is walking with the two disciples back to Jerusalem after encountering the risen Lord.

One of our fundamental tasks as leaders is the calling forth and developing of the gifts in each person in our institutions. This observing and calling forth of gifts in a community is a source of joy.

As Christians we are baptized into this dying and rising of Jesus Christ, grafted into this mystery and blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All Christian vocation is rooted in baptism, and it is nourished by word and sacrament.

Vocation

In his little book *Wishful Thinking*, theologian and writer Frederick Buechner defines *vocation* in a fresh way. "The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done. . . . The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."[1]

Buechner intends this to be a broad definition, to include all kinds of human activity for the good of the world, including religious and priestly life. The experience of vocation is a common biblical theme, whether in the call of Moses or in the call of so many of the leaders and prophets in the story of Israel.

Presence and experience of the Holy Spirit in vocation

Is the Holy Spirit original to Christian experience? Not by a long shot. According to the biblical testimony, the Spirit is present in the creation; in the work of prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, Ezekiel, Deborah, and Judith; in some kings, including Saul and David; and as wisdom. However, within a strict monotheism there

is little room for a full theological and spiritual reflection on the gift of the Holy Spirit to Moses, in the sense that we associate with later Christian theology. But the Spirit is at work in Egypt, Rome, Assyria, Babylon, China, India, in the cosmos beyond the Milky Way galaxy. This observation is not meant to discount the place in God's purposes of the people of Israel and its sense of covenant. The Spirit can't be constrained; it moves where it wills.

We come to our vocation of leadership with a strong sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the communities we serve. We believe that our respective communities are abundantly blessed with the gifts of the Spirit, witnessed in our parishioners, faculty, students, staff, and colleagues in leadership. We take as one of our fundamental tasks as leaders the calling forth and developing of the gifts in each person in our institutions. This observing and calling forth of gifts in a community is a source of joy.

Our lives are not lived in isolation but in the midst of real communities. So vocation cannot come from an act of will. It comes rather from listening to our lives to understand what they are truly about, quite apart from what we would like them to be about.

Educator and spiritual writer Parker Palmer has written many books about vocation and is most autographical in *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*.[2] His point is that we can try a lot of things before we find our true selves. For example, he writes that he lined up the loftiest ideals he could find and then tried to live out of those ideals. But no matter how well he did, he always fell short—because the bar was so high. These ideals, because they came from outside him, always felt unreal, like a distortion of his true self.

Vocation in this sense becomes an act of will, a grim determination that one's life will go this way or that, whether it wants to or not. This does not to work well, because the Spirit is always making new connections, and our gifts are being developed and shaped—or some may be going into remission—as we live our lives. Our lives are not lived in isolation but in the midst of real communities, parishes, congregations, colleagues, and families, where specific needs shape how we are responding. So vocation cannot really come from an act of the will. It comes rather from listening, from listening to our lives to understand what they are

truly about, quite apart from what we would like them to be about.

Vocation has its origins in the word *call*. My vocation is not a goal that I pursue. It is a calling that I hear. Before I can give direction to my life, I must listen to my life telling me who I am. I need to know the truths and values of my own identity, what I really care about at the end of the day. Behind this understanding of vocation is a truth that the ego does not want to hear—that there can be a great gulf between the way my ego wants to identify me and my true self. The desert monastic tradition of seeking spiritual guidance has always been about distinguishing the true and false self, where the false self is being aligned with the programs for success, achievement, and glamor that are so idolized in the dominant culture.

By contrast, living out of my Spirit-given gifts and strengths leads to peace, personal integration, and joy. When I am the John Klassen that God intends, that the Spirit has gifted, the result is joy and peace. If I insist on my own version of John, I will be looking for gifts I don't have, and trashing the real ones—a double negative. This line of thought reminds me of a Hasidic tale: Rabbi Zusya, when he was an old man, said, "In the coming world, they will not ask me: 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me: 'Why were you not Zusya?' "

The desert monastic tradition of seeking spiritual guidance has always been about distinguishing the true and false self, where the false self is being aligned with success. By contrast, living out of my Spirit-given gifts and strengths leads to peace, personal integration, and joy.

Finally, when we read the classical biblical and other accounts of vocation, we may be led to believe that there is one call and one response. In fact, there is a constant cycle of call and response in our lives, of getting it more or less right, of matching and mismatching.

My purpose for these brief reflections on vocation is to situate all the reflections that follow in a vocational context, using the word *vocation* in broad sense. No two leaders are exactly alike. Each will flourish when he or she is living out of a personal center. We want to make sure we are leading from the inside out.

Background on Saint Benedict and the Rule

I wish to provide a brief background on the Rule of Benedict (RB)[3] that serves as a major source for the following reflections. Benedict of Nursia (now Norcia) was born in 480 CE, and as a young student left Rome to seek the solitude of the caves near Subiaco in Italy. He lived there alone for three years and gradually developed a reputation as a holy man. Benedict was the beneficiary of a 200-year-old monastic tradition that had come out of Egypt to the West through the work of John Cassian. After some years, a group of monks invited Benedict to be their abbot or spiritual leader. From this experience he learned to be more compassionate, and his leadership became more pastoral. From living as a hermit and in community Benedict crafted the rule as we know it. This rule (way of life) represents a distilled version of the vast teaching about monastic life that emerged from the desert and from other monastics living in community. The rule was completed in about 530 CE.

Practical insights from the Rule of Benedict

Leadership, as the Rule of Benedict[1] imagines it (chapters 2 and 64, on the abbot or prioress), has to overcome our natural individualistic tendencies, both in the community and in the leader. Leadership always occurs in the context of a genuine community: leader and community are moving forward together.

It has taken me years to surrender to the wisdom of the group, to trust the wisdom of the group. With this surrender has come a genuine liberation from the need to control, and joy in the manner in which good decisions emerge.

On taking counsel. Benedict expands his fundamental insight into the life of a community with a remarkable chapter entitled "summoning the brothers for counsel" (RB 3). He writes, "As often as anything important is to be done in the monastery, the prioress shall call the whole community together and explain what the business is; and after hearing the advice of the sisters, let her ponder it and follow what she judges the wiser course. The reason we have said all should be called for counsel is that the Lord often reveals what is better to the younger" (RB 3:1–4).

It has taken me years of experience to surrender to the wisdom of the group, to trust that the community will rise to the challenge

and come to a good decision. With this surrender has come a genuine liberation from the need to control, and joy in the manner in which good decisions emerge from a thoughtful and prayerful engagement with an issue.

The most difficult challenge we face in community is to seek counsel without getting bogged down and losing focus. It takes skill and balance to design processes that seek input in a timely fashion, and move toward decision. An additional challenge is to bring a proposal to the community that has been well thought out but is not *fait accompli*. An ill-formed proposal will be shredded with objections and other thoughts. If a proposal is too zipped up, too complete, so that it is difficult for the community to offer real counsel—not just window-dressing input—the complaint will be, "He doesn't really want our ideas. This project is out of the chute—we are just rubber stamping."

Ignorance about oneself is seldom bliss. But facing one's shadow side is part of deep personal change. It is also part of liberation from fear.

Humility. In looking at the structure of the Rule of Benedict, and the block of spiritual teaching in chapters 5, 6, and 7 (on humility), one could argue that the desired outcome of Benedictine life is humility. The monastic journey begins with a certain humility, with the conviction that God is God and we are not. I am becoming more aware than ever of how difficult it is to receive criticism, no matter how constructive it is. The ego wants to protect the self and constructs a defense system to that end. Part of this is, of course, healthy. On the other hand, ignorance about oneself is seldom bliss. Facing one's shadow side is part of deep personal change. It is also part of liberation from fear. Part of this humility is acknowledging where I have acted out of a desire for self-preservation more than than out of courage.

Humility also allows for detachment. If we as leaders are to bring our ideas and gifts to the table of conversation, each individual has to be willing to let go of an idea, to let others turn it over, add to it, or subtract from it. In other words, the leader has to be willing to let the idea become the community's idea or project. If a leader tries to hang on to the idea, strategy, or project because of ego, then the dialogue will be blocked. If the prioress or abbot has pet projects that are rammed through and never

really become the project of the community, then as soon as that person leaves office, the community will begin to dismantle those projects.

Acquiring humility is a matter of learning about my blind spots. It's as though I have a hand of cards—five cards I hold and am able to see—and two or three are up on my forehead: you can see them and I am unable to. In other words, acquiring personal humility is the work of a community. I often kid that I have 130 monks working on my humility! Furthermore, we tend to think of humility as exclusively negative learning—I am discovering weaknesses, faults, and shortcomings. In fact, it also means discovering strengths, gifts, and blessings which I was unaware of or had not really received. Humility in this sense means coming to a warm and loving self-acceptance. The more progress I have made on this lifelong journey, the more peaceful and joyful I will be.

Acquiring personal humility is the work of a community. I often kid that I have 130 monks working on my humility! We tend to think of humility as negative learning, but it also means discovering strengths, gifts, and blessings I was unaware of.

This humility will reveal itself in tense situations, when the air is full of criticism and blame, with skills for listening, openness, and a nonjudgmental response. Self-deprecating humor can often reposition the conversation toward rationality and a greater awareness of the complexity of a situation. The humility a leader displays will tend to lead others toward the truth of an awkward or difficult situation.

Conclusion

The Rule of Benedict has given us a spirituality that has empowered human communities for 1500 years. I hope I have given you a glimpse of some of the spiritual resources present in it for reflecting on leadership and joy.

Notes

[1] "Vocation," in *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*, by Frederick Buechner (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

[2] Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 3.

[3] *RB 1980: The Rule of Saint Benedict in English*, edited by Timothy Fry et al. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981).
[4] The best full commentary in English is by Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996).

About the author

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Joy in the jail
Reflections on Acts 16:25–34

Jennifer Davis Sensenig

Insomnia, earthquake, prison ministry, social chaos, job failure, attempted suicide, care for abuse victims, civil rights of prisoners, and conflict with government: these matters are as current in today's headlines as they were in the Aegean Christian mission circa AD 40. In fact, all these issues emerge in the account of the apostle Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail. Woven in and through the story found in Acts 16:25–40 we also notice the distinctive fibers of Christian faith: worship, salvation, compassion, hospitality, preaching, joy, shared meals, belief in Jesus Christ, and baptism.

In scripture hardships associated with mission are contextualized according to a deeper joy, which stems from the good news of Christ's resurrection and the outbreak of the kingdom of God across the world.

Suffering in mission

A mission party of at least four—Paul, Silas, Timothy, and the unnamed narrator whom I'll call Luke—arrives in the city of Philippi, and in no time a couple of them get into holy trouble and land in jail. (From the perspective of the Philippian authorities, the men's infraction was creating an anti-Roman disturbance in the city. From the perspective of the Gospel narrator, their action, undertaken in the name of Jesus Christ, is a liberation from a triple-whammy of oppression: exploitation of a Greek oracular gift by Roman commerce, domination of a slave by her owner, and control of a single female by a group of males.)

While incarceration is rarely part of a church mission plan, it was not uncommon for and perhaps even expected by Paul. According to the timeline in Acts, by the time Paul reaches Philippi, he has already been driven out of Antioch of Pisidia, had fled Iconium when threatened with stoning, and has been stoned in Lystra, not to mention having been (temporarily) blinded by

the Lord himself! Additionally, Peter has been jailed twice in Jerusalem (Acts 4:3; 12:4) and John once (4:3), and John the Baptist and Jesus have both died in the jaws of a criminal justice system. Apparently having a record is not unusual for a prophet of God's kingdom.

After this episode in jail there will, of course, be more suffering. Paul boasts of his personal trials for the sake of the gospel (comparing himself favorably against the "super-apostles" influencing the Corinthian church) in this way:

> *far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. Five times I have received from the Jew[ish leaders] the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. (2 Cor. 11:23–28, NRSV)*

Through worship the faithful are able to freely express pain and even despair, because in so doing transformation is already underway through the abiding presence and matchless power of God.

Nevertheless, in scripture hardships associated with mission are contextualized according to a deeper joy, which stems from the good news of Christ's resurrection and the outbreak of the kingdom of God across the world.

God's power—in prison

Human worship of God, such as the prayer and singing of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:25), both *originates* in God's joy and delight in humankind and *creates* joy in the life of the worshiper. This is not to discount the need for lament and petition when everything seems wrong in our own lives or the life of the world. Yet, as we see in the Hebrew worship book—the Psalms—through worship

the faithful are able to freely express pain and even despair, because in so doing transformation is already underway through the abiding presence and matchless power of God. Are we surprised that when we are in deep pain we crave both songs of aching lament and songs that lift our spirits with hope of "joy in the morning?"

We don't know how inmates Paul and Silas prayed and sang in Philippi, but we know their standard prayers and songs from the Psalms. Perhaps a fitting psalm was 102, which reminds us of God's attention to the cries of prisoners:

> *Let this be recorded for a generation to come,*
> *so that a people yet unborn may praise the* LORD*:*
> *that he looked down from his holy height,*
> *from heaven the* LORD *looked at the earth,*
> *to hear the groans of the prisoners,*
> *to set free those who were doomed to die;*
> *so that the name of the* LORD *may be declared in Zion,*
> *and [God's] praise in Jerusalem,*
> *when peoples gather together,*
> *and kingdoms, to worship the* LORD*. (Ps. 102:18–22)*

Another psalm they may have sung in such a time as this is Psalm 16:

> *Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge . . .*
>
> *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.*
> *(Ps. 16:1, 7–11)*

This psalm was significant for Paul, who quoted it in Antioch of Pisidia (see Acts 13:35) when speaking about how God raised Jesus from the dead. Did these early followers of Jesus believe that God's saving power was also available to them in a prison cell? Though wounded, bleeding, and achy, through their worship and song prisoners Paul and Silas were turning toward joy. We glimpse in the story of Paul and Silas this arc of joy that begins long before any present suffering. Like a rainbow emerging after a thunderstorm, on the other side of the Philippian jail story is an outbreak of joy as a man believes and a household is saved (v. 34). Like the first century "prisoners [who] were listening" (v. 25), we contemporary readers of Acts, kept awake by thoughts of our own suffering, might consider songs and prayers rooted in joy as a way through our own dark nights.

Suicide prevention

Whether or not Paul and Silas' midnight worship provokes the earthquake, the miracle of this story is an "act of God" in our modern sense. An earthquake renders the prison facility useless, and social chaos is about to ensue. At this point we are reintroduced to the dutiful jailer we met in verses 23–24.

A recent study in the state where I live (Virginia) indicates that suicide rates are increasing, especially among older men. Recently in our area Mennonite Central Committee sponsored a storytelling tour for the prevention of gun violence. I learned that the majority of deaths by handguns in the United States are not homicides but suicides. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention break down death by firearms into four categories: homicide, suicide, accidental death, and legal intervention.[1]

The heart of this salvation story from Acts is suicide prevention and the resulting joy of literally saving a man's life, saving a family, and saving a community from the devastation of suicide.

The heart of this salvation story from Acts is suicide prevention and the resulting joy of literally saving a man's life, saving a family, and saving a community from the devastation of suicide. While we may not teach and preach extensively on suicide prevention each year in our churches, it is vitally important that our leaders demonstrate a capacity for addressing this issue, lest the church

fail to be a trustworthy source of hope when faced with the trauma of attempted or completed suicides in our communities.[2] While mental illness can be a factor in suicide attempts, it isn't always. The jailer in Acts 16 attempts suicide not after a long struggle with depression but rather in a moment of extreme fear. He has failed in his job and anticipates the loss of his employment or—more likely—his life. In teaching and preaching with this text in view, it is helpful to name the kinds of failures and losses that trigger self-harming behaviors and suicide attempts.

This text also lends itself to a discussion of the availability of lethal weapons and the risk this access entails for people who, in a moment of crisis, literally cannot see other options. As if to emphasize the blind terror of the jailer, his call for lights (v. 29) makes readers realize how dark his present moment has become.

Joy released

The liberating tremor of the earthquake has multiple effects. The foundations of the prison (architecturally and sociologically) are shaken by this act of God. Additionally, not just our heroes Paul and Silas but also all the other prisoners are freed. Finally, the earthquake has a ripple effect in the jailer's own body as "he [falls] down trembling before Paul and Silas" (v. 29). With their jailer cowering before them, Paul and Silas may seem to have the upper hand in this moment; they appear to be in league with the god of earthquakes.

But we do well to remember that prior to their imprisonment the mission workers were stripped and beaten with rods. Their feet were shackled in the jail. It may be that the missionary prisoners are unable to walk. The text describes how the jailer "*brought them* outside" (v. 30) "*took them* and washed their wounds," (v. 33), and ultimately "*brought them* up into the house and set food before them" (v. 34). Stripped of his power over the prisoners, the jailer is himself lowered to a point of vulnerability and asks: "What must I do to be saved?" (v. 31).

From a contemporary vantage point, the response "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved—you and your household" (v. 31) may seem pat or pious. Out of context we hear this response from a powerful successful church leader (Paul) with impeccable credentials. But in context, we hear these words from

beaten men whose future seems as precarious as that of the trembling jailer.

While we don't know what "word of the Lord" (v. 32) Paul and Silas spoke to the jailer and his family, Psalm 16 would have been a fitting place to begin. The interior verses (omitted in the earlier quotation) read:

> *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 sorrow;*
> *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. (Ps. 16:2–6)*

Paul and Silas do not rely on a bloodthirsty god who forces the hand of a failed jailer to raise a sword against his own body. The rejoicing in the jailer's home that night celebrates salvation for the jailer and his family, the sparing of his life, and the protection of Silas and Paul. It also celebrates a possible new direction for the people of Philippi.

Without erasing the pain we experience in life, joy redeems it. I recently met a woman who has made relating to victims of trauma her life's work. I had read about her ministry and expected to find a sober, even broken woman. What I noticed in her, however, was her profound joy in life. Many of us have experienced financially impoverished communities in which there is nevertheless joy in life shared.

Canonical healing

This episode in Acts is not only a story of joyful redemption for Paul, Silas, the jailer, and his family. I also understand this account as a joyful redemption of a previous and parallel account in the book of Acts. Recall the episode in Peter's ministry (Acts 12) when he is liberated from jail by an angelic break-in (and break

out!). Like Paul's imprisonment in chapter 16, Peter's imprisonment in this case is brief. Peter's jailbreak is all the more memorable because of the confident servant girl, Rhoda. She is, of course, the sole member of Mary's good-news house who believes that the community's prayers for Peter have been answered, and she recognizes his voice at the outer door. She is "overjoyed" at her discovery (12:14). Thus, elements that create a link between these two stories include the two apostles (Peter and Paul), a short imprisonment, a miraculous release, arrival at a (safe) house, and an outbreak of joy.

Another element linking these two stories is much more troubling. At the end of the account of Peter's jailbreak in Acts 12, his former guards are executed at King Herod's command. As a whole, the story of Peter's escape doesn't make the New Revised Common Lectionary cut and thus many of our churches are at risk of forgetting it altogether.[3] But it deserves our attention, especially noting the parallel to the miraculous escape by Paul and Silas in Acts 16. In my most recent read-through of Acts, my excitement about Peter's liberation and my joy in the character of Rhoda were tempered when I remembered that while Peter is spared (at least for the present), the lives of the jailers-guards are capriciously extinguished. What does it mean to live according to the gospel of Jesus Christ, when the preservation of our own lives rests not exclusively but at least in part on the loss of other lives?

While I will not weigh in on the historical debate about whether the author of Luke-Acts was a physician, I am confident that this writer had a genuine interest in healing the historical wounds of the Christian movement, and that he offered his writing, in some cases, as a balm for a wounded church. Might these two parallel stories be included, among other reasons, to redeem a history in which Peter's life was saved at others' expense? Might Paul's intervention in behalf of a jailer's life increase the church's care for any and every life, even the lives of people who carry out evil orders, whether or not those orders are legally sanctioned?

Household joy

Of the three stories of redemption set in Philippi (Acts 16)—featuring Lydia, the slave girl, and the jailer—two of the people

involved certainly become believers: Lydia and the jailer. It is not clear what direction the life of the slave girl takes when her oracular power dries up and she (presumably) regains her own voice. Likewise, it is not clear whether other women at the riverside synagogue agree with Lydia about the good news of Jesus Christ preached by Paul. But at the least, Lydia, the jailer, and the jailer's family become the nucleus of the Christian outpost in Philippi. Among the characteristics of this church emerging from the founding conversion stories, we find the leadership of women (Acts 16:15, 40), healing (16:18), concern for economic justice (16:16), vital worship and prayer (16:13, 25), and joy (16:34). If the timeline in Acts is accurate, the author of Luke-Acts was present in Philippi not only during the short period of initial conversions but also for the next three years, until rejoining Paul (Acts 20:5) Thus, we are not surprised to see these same themes (women leaders, healing, justice, worship, joy) emerging as distinctive emphases of Luke's Gospel.

We are not surprised to find Luke's Gospel studded with outbreaks of joy—from heavenly messengers, to a parabolic parent, to Jesus himself, to all who witness with the blessing of the risen Lord.

This logic might be circular, as Luke is the presumed author of both the Gospel and Acts. But our New Testament also includes a letter from Paul to the church in Philippi. And this letter also includes the themes of women leaders, healing, justice, worship, and joy. As a result, I imagine Luke in the city of Philippi, participating in the newly planted church for some years and being schooled—perhaps for the first time—in congregational life. These gospel emphases would be his frame of reference for further research into the good news when he eventually traveled to Jerusalem (Acts 21:17) and had the opportunity to begin his careful investigation and "orderly account" of the gospel (Luke 1:1–3).

Are we then not surprised to find that Luke's Gospel is studded with outbreaks of joy—from heavenly messengers ("I am bringing you good news of great joy . . ." [2:10]), to a parabolic parent ("But we had to celebrate and rejoice . . ." [15:32]), to Jesus himself ("he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" [10:21]), to all who witness with the blessing of the risen Lord (24:52)?

Notes

[1] I would make a different distinction between categories 1 and 4, referring to them (respectively) instead as "illegal homicide" and "legal homicide."

[2] When we speak of suicide, we need compassionate language that ministers to families and friends of victims. For example, when addressing these issues in general, I avoid referring to "successful suicide," as certainly no suicide is a success.

[3] For the text of a short three-person drama based on the Acts 12 story, contact the author at cmc_jennifer@ntelos.net. Characters are Luke the evangelist visiting in Jerusalem, Mary (mother of John Mark) the house-church leader in Jerusalem, and Rhoda.

About the author

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Inheriting joy
Lessons from ancestors in the faith

Korey Dyck

For the most part, my life has been carefree. I had a nurturing childhood, education at several Mennonite institutions, a supportive church and family. A retrospective glance reveals a life that has been calm, predictable, proceeding according to plan.

Most of my adult life I have been connected to universities, as either a struggling student or an impoverished contract lecturer. I have conveniently detoured around many of the highs and lows of life, adhering to a mantra of deferred gratification: Someday, I think, my life will take the shape I ultimately want it to have, and then I will enjoy it. *Stay calm and you'll get there*. Looking back, I seem to have bypassed joy. I know contentment, and even happiness at times, but I tend to think of these feelings as self-generated.

By following a trail through history I seek an appreciation for the faith of my ancestors, a perspective from which to witness the joy in their lives that is found in relationship with God.

On further reflection, I realize that I have been touched by joy at moments throughout my life. Graduations, championships, an engagement and wedding, and the birth of two children—these were all joyous occasions. And I notice on reflection that these joyous moments were deeply influenced by the presence of people who have given me support and love. I did not experience these events in isolation, and I could not have generated them on my own. Teachers, tutors, teammates, family, and friends have all played a role in bringing joy to my life.

A longer look back

Though I may not often take time to do it, reflecting back on my life to find joy is not that hard. And I see how that joy is connected to moments shared with people I love. What is harder is examining the longer history of my people in a search for joy.

Where in the extended narrative of Mennonite history do I look for joyous events? Where are the moments of past joy in which I can in some sense participate now with the cloud of witnesses who went before me? And what can I learn about joy from these religious ancestors?

In these pages I propose to take a brief trip through a part of Mennonite history that relates to my extended family. That is, I will be looking for joy in historical events connected to my ancestors. But in addition to sleuthing through my family history, I want to consider God's work in these events of my family's past. By following this trail through history I seek an appreciation for the faith of my ancestors, a perspective from which to witness the joy in their lives that is found only in relationship with God.

Can we inherit joy? Perhaps doing so requires that we look in the right places, and take initiative to apply the lessons found in our history.

The travel debt

When she was a young child in the early 1920s, my maternal grandmother arrived with her parents at the Port of Quebec harbour. The family disembarked from the *Empress of France*, and from there began a series of train trips across Canada. My grandmother was part of the first group that arrived in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. It was in Rosthern that my ancestors were met by David Toews. Like some 20,000 other Mennonite immigrants from the Soviet Union between 1923 and 1930, my grandmother's family dreamed about a new beginning, and on the Canadian prairies they slowly forged new lives and livelihoods.

As refugees from the Russian Revolution, these settlers arrived in Canada with few and meager belongings. Many could not even pay for their transport. To help facilitate the immigration process and finance and secure passage for this influx of Mennonites, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization was established. Under the leadership of A. A. Friesen, the newly formed board secured an agreement with Canadian Pacific Railway that guaranteed a loan—it would amount to $10,000,000 with interest over the loan's duration—to bring Mennonites over the ocean and across the prairies.

It became the responsibility of David Toews to manage the finances for this mass migration, and he personally guaranteed the

loan to bring his fellow Mennonites to this new country. He spent many years overseeing the integration of these immigrants into their new homeland. In 1923, 2,759 immigrants landed, and there were 5,048 new arrivals in 1924. By 1930, a total of 20,201 Mennonites had arrived in the promised land of Canada. Because of regulations associated with their travel arrangements, the new arrivals could only live in the countryside and were unable to take up urban occupations that would have helped them get established in Canada more quickly.

Carrying responsibility for more than 20,000 people and their enormous *Reiseschuld* (travel debt), Toews had an unenviable task. The work of collecting the money owed he eventually passed on to C. F. Klassen, but Toews took his personal guarantee seriously and worried about whether the debt would ever be repaid. Many obstacles prevented its timely repayment: the Great Depression of the 1930s reduced the savings of Mennonites who had come to Canada in the 1870s, and the new immigrants struggled to break the prairie sod and establish farms. Some of them saved up to repay the travel debt as quickly as possible. Others delayed payment, spending their earnings in acquiring a few personal comforts before beginning repayment. And some immigrants refused to pay at all, rationalizing that the government-run railway had enough money. Sickness, death, crop failures, and other factors continued to prevent the full repayment of the travel debt.

The weight of the debt and his promise remained heavy for David Toews in his later years. But by November 1946 it was finally paid in full. Pastor J. J. Thiessen visited the elderly Toews and shared the good news: "The debt is paid." Toews could no longer hear very well. "The entire debt and all the interest has been repaid," Thiessen said again. At first Toews would not believe his ears. He chided Thiessen: "I know you all feel sorry for me, since I gave my word that the debt would be paid. You know I can't die until it is paid."

Thiessen bent down and cupped his hands around the ear of the elderly Toews and once more repeated the good news. David Toews sat in his rocker and shook his head. He could not believe it. When he finally realized that it was indeed true, he bowed his head and wept. With tears of joy soaking his beard, he kept saying

again and again, "*Gott sei Dank*! Thank God!" With his burden lifted, David Toews died a few months later.[1]

"In all their misery, they still sing"

My paternal grandmother and her four children were part of the larger story of Russian Mennonite refugees who survived the Great Trek and made it out of the Soviet Union, going first to Paraguay and then later to Canada.[2] In the following story, narrated in *Up from the Rubble*, Peter Dyck recounts his meeting with the first group of Russian Mennonite refugees who fled to the Netherlands after World War 2. Peter Dyck and Dutch Mennonite pastor Teerd Oeds Ma Hylke Hylkema listened as the refugees told their stories of life in the Soviet Union, the famine and repression, the war, and their trek to the west. The refugees also shared the faith in God that sustained them:

> *Presently one of the women began to sing, softly at first, but as the others joined her, the volume increased. People nearby stopped to listen.*
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Ist's auch eine Freude | *Is there joy and gladness* |
> | Mensch geboren sein? | *In this vale of strife?* |
> | Darf ich mich auch heute | *Naught but tears and sadness* |
> | meines Leben freu'n? | *In this earthly life?* |
>
> *Now it was my turn to pull out my handkerchief:*
>
> *Where there's so much sorrow,*
> *Many doubts and fears;*
> *Cares that leave the morrow*
> *Dim with death and tears.*
>
> *And then the reassuring third verse:*
>
> *O what consolation,*
> *There's a God who cares!*
> *Jesus brought salvation*
> *From the world's despair.*
>
> *They sang from memory most of the fourteen verses of this familiar hymn I had grown up with and that was one of my mother's favorites. They sang not only in four-part harmony, but also with feeling and personal conviction,*

as if they were answering our question about their belief and spirituality.

Wüstens doch die Leute	*Many have not tasted*
Wie's beim Heiland ist.	*Of the Saviour's grace.*
Sicher würde heute	*Surely they would follow*
Mancher noch ein Christ.	*If they knew his peace.*

When we left, the thirty-three were all standing at the gate, waving goodbye and singing. Hylkema turned to me and said, "Can you imagine, in all their misery, they still sing!"[3]

Along the road to freedom

The *Along the Road to Freedom* art exhibit created by Ray Dirks tells the stories of mothers, daughters, grandmothers, and sisters who led their families out of persecution and suffering to lives of freedom and peace. The exhibit features a portrait of my paternal grandmother, and it portrays the quiet heroes of other families, too—women whose stories have often been lost to us. The memory mosaic the artworks create values the stories of women, women who were compelled to run for their lives, or were forced to remain behind. Portraits of these particular women of courage fill in an important historical gap, telling future listeners what life was really like for them.

One woman who is representative of this group is Anna Dick Bergmann. Anna grew up in a prosperous and happy family, and she married into another wealthy family. When the Russian Revolution came they lost everything. Abram, Anna's husband; his father; and all male family members over eighteen years of age were killed, leaving Anna a widow with six children. They barely survived the great famine in 1922. Finally she and her children were able to make the long journey from Russia to Manitoba, where she and other similarly impoverished families began a new life in humble homes on the cold and unforgiving prairie. As Ray Dirks interviewed relatives in preparation for painting her portrait, what he heard, over and over again, was about what a joy-filled, generous, and forgiving person she was. At a family gathering where the painting was unveiled, someone asked, "Do any of you ever remember our grandmother saying anything in

Anna Dick Bergmann (1880–1961) was a tower of strength not only for her children and her church family but also for many others whose lives she touched. Anna lived a life of love, forgiveness, and inspiring faith that the Lord God is the Father of the widow and orphans. (*Portion of a portrait by Ray Dirks, in the exhibit* Along the Road to Freedom. *Used by permission of the artist. All rights reserved.*)

anger?" A long pause followed, and finally one person said, "A man in dirty clothing came to our door once, and she told him to take a bath."[4]

Joy can be ours, too

The stories of David Toews, Peter Dyck, and Anna Bergmann bear repeating. When we cease to tell the stories of our past and when we neglect the rich heritage that is ours, we no longer understand how we arrived where we are today. If we do not avail ourselves of resources—handed down to us by those whose faith saw them through hardship as a body of believers—we miss opportunities to employ their hard-gained wisdom.

God used ordinary people to perform miracles from which we can learn. Some of us have ties of kinship with them; others are heirs to their faith. The blessings of God-given joy which they knew in their lives continue to be available to us today.

Notes

[1] The David Toews story has been retold for various audiences. See D. J. Schellenberg and Peter Dyck's chapter "David and the Promised Land," in *Gathering at the Hearth: Stories Mennonites Tell*, edited by John E. Sharp (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 53–61; and Cornelia Lehn's *I Heard Good News Today: Stories for Children* (Faith and Life Press: Newton, Kansas, 1983), 135–36.

[2] "The Great Trek was the period from 1943 to 1945 when thousands of Mennonite refugees left the Soviet Union in an attempt to escape to the west. With its retreat westward after the capitulation at Stalingrad, the German army was ordered to take with it the remaining population of Soviet Germans, numbering approximately 350,000; this number included 35,000 Mennonites." From Helmut T. Huebert and Susan Huebert, "Great Trek, 1943–1945," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*; http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Great_Trek,_1943-1945&oldid=119714.

[3] This passage is excerpted from Peter and Elfrieda Dyck's book *Up from the Rubble: The Epic Rescue of Thousands of War-Ravaged Mennonite Refugees* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 84–85.

[4] Ray Dirks is curator of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba. The portrait of Anna Dick Bergmann is part of an exhibit of twenty-six portraits; see http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/files/gallery/AlongTheRoadToFreedomTourInfo.pdf.

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Joy in welcoming the newcomer

Gilberto Pérez Jr.

What is joy? Where does it come from? Is it attainable in the presence of pain and hardship? Can people subjected to extreme poverty and violence experience joy? Is joy sustainable for one who encounters such people as part of one's employment in the social work profession or other ministries?

It is not easy to know where joy originates and how it comes alive in us—in our feelings, thoughts, and bodies. But joy, an important ingredient in positive and caring relationships, can provide a vital foundation for social workers and other ministering people.

My parents regularly opened our home for conversation with people who were fleeing violence in Central America. Our new friends' faces reflected joy when we took time to listen as they told their migration stories.

Early experiences of welcoming newcomers

I was in my early teens when I first experienced what it means to be joyful in welcoming newcomers. My parents regularly opened our home for conversation and relationship with people who were fleeing threats and violence in their home countries in Central America. Our home, located in Robstown in south Texas, was a stopping point for newcomers who were heading north. Back then I didn't fully understand what joy meant or even what welcoming the newcomer was about. But what I did know is that our new friends' faces reflected joy when we took time to listen as they told their migration stories. Our living room was a safe place. Our new friends' stories were showing us how much we needed to learn from them about life's struggles and about the human spirit.

In my early twenties I found myself living in a rural Kansas community where I was charged with conducting an assessment of

the needs of Latino newcomers. Again I spent many hours sitting in living rooms listening to stories about what newcomers experienced. But in these short conversations I learned that moving toward the newcomer is sometimes hard work: not everyone I encountered was interested in conversing with me. Some were suspicious and wondered why a community worker was asking questions about their needs. It was an imperfect needs assessment, and I didn't experience joy.

In my mid-twenties, after working hard to complete college, I finally graduated with a degree in social work. I experienced great joy at having passed a significant milestone in my life. A couple of years later, my wife and I moved to her home community in Aibonito, Puerto Rico. We had been considering a service assignment, and Puerto Rico seemed like a wonderful place to start my social work career. I worked for several years as a hospice social worker and mental health professional at a partial hospitalization program at Hospital General Menonita, and I earned a master's degree in social work. Then we decided to move to Goshen, Indiana.

Work in community mental health

While I felt excitement about moving to a new place, I was also nervous and unsure about what to expect in my role at a community mental health center. I was to offer therapy to children, youth, and adults suffering from persistent and serious mental illness. The majority of the clients I was to serve would be first-generation newcomers from Mexico. There were so many unknowns about this new job, and many unanswered questions about how to welcome clients to the mental health center. Often I found myself trying to understand whether it is possible to experience joy in this work.

In my new job I heard migration stories from Latinos who arrived for mental health services. They were like the stories I had heard as a young teenager and later as a twenty- and thirty-something. I kept hearing that making a new life in a new country is not always a joyful experience. Newcomers at the mental health center spoke of difficulty in adjusting, of not feeling welcome in their new community. Where would joy come from when some residents expressed displeasure about their presence in the com-

munity? Where would joy come from when some of those seeking my help at the mental health center had a family member who had been deported by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials?

Would community members and church members find joy in welcoming these newcomers? What could I do to find joy in social work with Latino newcomers? How could this work be a gift, when people were in so much distress?

Bienvenido

During the next few years we sought to give meaning and hope amid these questions. Newcomers engaged in meaningful conversations through the Bienvenido program, created to assist them in cultivating a supportive network and identifying ways they could get involved in their new community.[1] Newcomers and community leaders entered into welcoming spaces that allowed all to state their fears, hopes, and dreams about life in a new country. Bienvenido groups developed across Indiana, and eventually organizations and churches in other states started their own Bienvenido groups. I felt joy and satisfaction in seeing newcomers develop a strong sense of self. All that was needed was to create relationships with systems that could benefit from their experiences and gifts.

Are there specific practices in our spiritual journey that help us find joy? Is joy a state of motivation, or do we have to work to find joy? How does joy connect with welcoming the newcomer?

Literature in social work abounds in discussion about adhering to the social work ethical principles of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. There is much less literature in the profession on how to find joy in serving the most vulnerable in our society. Subtle expressions of unhappiness and discontent are prevalent among social workers and religious workers. To sustain joy in this work calls for critical awareness about selflessness, hard work, and character.

Understanding joy

The Bible abounds in passages that help us understand what joy is. More than 200 verses in scripture speak directly to joy; the

majority of them are found in the Psalms. Here are three examples that help us understand joy in the Bible:

> *There on the poplars we hung our harps,*
> *for there our captors asked us for songs,*
> *our tormentors demanded songs of joy;*
> *they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*
> *How can we sing the songs of the LORD*
> *while in a foreign land? (Ps. 137:2–4)*[2]

> *Many, LORD, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?"*
> *Let the light of your face shine on us.*
> *Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.*
> *In peace I will lie down and sleep,*
> *for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety. (Ps. 4:6–8)*

> *You make known to me the path of life;*
> *you will fill me with joy in your presence,*
> *with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Ps. 16:11)*

These passages surely guide us to a place where our troubled souls can find hope and joy. But are there specific practices in our spiritual journey that help us find joy? Is joy a state of motivation, or do we have to work to find joy? How does joy connect with welcoming the newcomer? Social workers and religious workers can surely live out their ethical principles and spiritual disciplines, but it may be a bigger challenge to live them out if they do not understand some key aspects of a joyful character.

Spontaneity

In my experience, joy is deeply linked with spontaneity. A capacity for spontaneity is something all of us have probably exhibited at some point. Spontaneity might be expressed in just showing up at our friends' house and inviting them out to dinner, going out to see a film on a whim, or having an impromptu picnic in the park.

What might spontaneity look like in welcoming the newcomer? It may not mean that we act on impulse. For Christians, spontaneity might involve giving hungry people something to eat or inviting strangers into our homes and churches (Matt. 25:35). We might act spontaneously and with joy in teaching others about an injustice that newcomers to our community are experi-

encing. Spontaneity might mean collecting a special offering for a family that shows up at our church's worship service asking for money. Spontaneity might mean showing some momentary irritation in speaking to our friends about the fact that they are not actively supporting the least of these.

Could spontaneity bubble up from within us so freely that we don't worry about what onlookers will think or say about our actions in behalf of newcomers? Might spontaneity in welcoming the newcomer connect us more deeply with God's desires and interests?

Active impatience

Active impatience in welcoming the newcomer requires us to resist the typical cultural response of detaching ourselves from the issues newcomers face. People around us express a variety of detachment attitudes: "Immigration isn't something we deal with on a daily basis, so why should we worry about it?" "Let the people in the border states take care of the issue." "Find someone else to talk to about this. I'm not listening anymore." "The system is broken, and the government has to fix it. I sent a letter to my legislator." Encountering apathy can lead us to feel impatience, disgust, and hopelessness—so different from the joy that we want to characterize our lives.

Active impatience in welcoming the newcomer requires us to resist the typical cultural response of detaching ourselves from the issues newcomers face.

What does active impatience look like? Active impatience is about speaking for our newcomer friends when they cannot speak. It might lead us to meet with a representative of the local pharmacy in order to demand to know why the store has refused to fill a prescription for someone who has presented a valid international identification card. It might mean speaking to church or service groups about how newcomers experience our community. Active impatience resists accepting delay or a slow pace for needed change. Our efforts to educate others are a way of displaying resolve and courage to engage in difficult conversations.

Active impatience could mean being publicly critical of legislators and other leaders who display passivity on the subject of immigration reform, who are too willing to yield to forces that

resist change. Our active impatience could compel us to engage strangers or newcomers when they are in need. Jesus had the option of refusing to heal the centurion's servant, but instead he chose to bring healing (Matt 8:5–13). Jesus' response is a model for us in rejecting prevailing norms of apathy and detachment to instead welcome newcomers to our communities.

Gifts of spontaneity and active impatience

I no longer work at a community mental health center, and I no longer regularly sit with and listen to newcomers as they talk about their struggles and joys. Nevertheless, I see gifts of spontaneity and active impatience all around me, and they bring me joy.

It is a joy to witness people from all walks of life working side by side with newcomers on justice issues such as food insecurity, domestic violence, and neighbor-to-neighbor relationships. I rejoice to see people in national advocacy organizations engage in fasts to press for immigration reform. Their active impatience in educating newcomers about their civil rights and positive mental health helps these new residents experience empowerment in this difficult time. I find joy in observing newcomer women in my community as they organize a support group for other women who are new here. What they began as a spontaneous response has turned into a weekly gathering of mutual support. Their practice, which values human connection, is a gift to newcomer women who experience injustice and pain from people whose words and actions would devalue them.

I find joy in observing newcomer women in my community as they organize a support group for other women who are new here. What they began as a spontaneous response has turned into a weekly gathering of mutual support.

When I see newcomers engage in demonstrations that invite legislators to show compassion toward immigrants, I know active impatience is in their souls, and I rejoice. When people who are part of organizations that support newcomers participate in Bienvenido facilitator trainings, I rejoice as they listen with compassion and curiosity to stories of migration. When long-established congregations in my community share their worship space with newcomer congregations, I rejoice to see them show that they are ready to walk the talk of being welcoming churches.

When local Latino pastors meet with county law enforcement officials to discuss the discrimination people in their congregations experience when they are pulled over by traffic cops, I rejoice to see them living out the gift of active impatience. It brings joy to see people from both sides building relationships and in the process finding their perspectives changed.

In my experience, spontaneity and active impatience characterize people who are attaining and sustaining joy through serving, recognizing the dignity and value of others, valuing human relationships, and living with integrity. I see bountiful joy in their lives, and it brings me joy.

Spontaneity and active impatience characterize people who are attaining and sustaining joy through serving, recognizing the dignity and value of others, valuing human relationships, and living with integrity.

Where does joy come from?

We tend to think that joy comes from within. We tend to expect that if we think harder and longer—or more broadly and carefully—about how to experience joy, we will settle our troubled souls. But spontaneity and active impatience point directly to joy being something I experience as I engage with the other and not just with myself. The movement toward our neighbors, legislators, and community leaders is what welcoming is all about, and it brings joy.

I am joyful when I think of all the things my newcomer friends and their support systems are doing together to settle their troubled souls and bring hope to our future together. In all these activities and relationships, I am learning to understand that joy begins with our reaching out to one another in trust, not fully knowing how God's joy will make itself known to us. This reaching out is the beginning of a joyful character, even in the presence of pain and suffering.

Psalm 16:11 reminds us that our path with the newcomer can be filled with joy, spontaneity, and active impatience, because it is God who gives us joy even when what we hope for takes its time to come to fruition. Joy involves an experience with the other and with the divine. This joy leads us through those imperfect spontaneous moments and imperfect active impatient experiences that come when we welcome newcomers.

Notes

[1]For more information, see http://bienvenidosolutions.org/.
[2] Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

About the author

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Drawing from deep wells
Joy in the work of justice

Sarah Thompson

> *We live in an extraordinary moment on earth. We possess more technical prowess and knowledge than our ancestors could have dreamt of . . .*
>
> *At the same time we witness destruction of life in dimensions that confronted no previous generation in recorded history.—Joanna Macy*[1]

During the summers of my late childhood, my mother would take my brother and me with her to visit older people from our church who could not travel to attend services, or those whose bio-families lived far away. I remember these visits because of the particulars: the M&Ms at Ethel and Myron's house, the smell of Doña Catalina's house, the speed bumps on the driveway of the maze-like nursing home where Hank lived. During these afternoon visits, while my mother and the elder conversed, I would rehearse tunes from recent piano lessons in my head or tussle with my brother or play with any toys that were available. When asked, I would pause and dutifully respond to any questions about my life and church.

One time, after a visit with a solitary but joyous elder, Mom put the car in reverse to leave. As she twisted around to see to back down Mr. Andrew's driveway, she said to me, "He draws from deep wells."

It was at these visits that learned that I do not like peanut brittle, but I pretended to like it so as not to upset Mrs. Rodrick. She usually made it especially for our visits. She would hand it to us with a loving, semi-toothless grin, as if to say, "If I can't enjoy it, at least you can." I was so good at pretending to like it that when I told my mother a few years ago that I dislike peanut brittle, she could not believe me!

After each visit we'd climb back in the hot car. As I shifted on the sticky backseat, I would sometimes catch part of an oblique

comment my mom made to my brother or me as she reflected aloud on these afternoon excursions. I remember some of them because of the "teachable moment" tone of her voice. One time, after a visit with a solitary but joyous elder, she put the car in reverse to leave. As she twisted around to see to back down Mr. Andrew's driveway, she said to me, "Sarah, he draws from deep wells." As a thirty-year-old, I am only now beginning to understand what she meant.

From depths carved out by sorrow

When you have a deep well, you draw from a place that will not dry up quickly. Though you face difficulties in your life that threaten to dry you out, if you have a deep well you can draw nourishment from waters more profound than the evil you face. Joy is found at the depths of the wells.

Joy is more enduring than any particular emotion. Joy is deeper than happiness. Joy is sustained, not fleeting. While joy may have height, the height comes not from manic emotion but from the sense of rising from depths carved out by sorrow. Some say that those who know joy only know it because they also know sorrow. Sorrow and grief are indeed powerful teachers, and when we learn their lessons our capacity for joy expands.

What makes you come alive?

Another way to know joy is through the practice of paying attention to what makes one feel truly alive. Howard Thurman, known to many as the spiritual leader of the US civil rights movement, is often quoted as saying the following to young people who came to him seeking career advice at that critical time in history: "Do not ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive. Then do that, because the world needs people who have come alive!"

We are at a crucial moment in the life of the world, when consumerism driven by our desires often trumps the gospel call to respond to the basic needs of other people and the earth. Thurman's exhortation could be seen by some as a continuation of this trend. Yet Thurman's words point to an aliveness that comes from a depth. When I feel truly alive I cannot help but see my individual needs and dreams inexorably linked with the life and well-being of the world.

The worst of times, the best of times

In my visits with elders, I no longer play on the floor nearby but am fully in the conversation. In college in the southern United States, I interviewed older activists about the civil rights movement. Beginning in the 1950s many worked daily to end legal racial segregation in the United States. They organized intensely to change the way non-whites were viewed by the power structure and population. They rallied to call attention to the racism of wars abroad. It was a brutal, dynamic, grueling time. I heard them say over and over again that though it was the worst of times, it was also the best of times.

The drive to be fully alive, to dig a deep well, will lead to experiencing the best of times and the worst of times, joy and sorrow together. What I have experienced in social justice leadership I have found to be true of my spiritual journey as well, as a disciple of Jesus.

No matter how it is opened, a well does not automatically become deep. Metaphorically and literally, moving through earth's multilayered shell to reach underground aquifers requires consistent attention and care. This well-digging project is not simply for the purposes of extracting an earth resource for individual consumption. Rather it is lifework that seeks to draw responsibly and respectfully from these waters in order to share and replenish the ecosystem.

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Meeting God knee-deep in the muck

To do what makes me feel fully alive I need a deep well. After all, I have no guarantees about how much time I have in this life. I have no certainty about exactly where my vocation in faith-based global peace and justice work will lead me. I have no assurances about how this vocation will unfold. And I do not know whether I have the capacity to face the beauty and terror of life. But I trust that God will guide me and dance with me and meet me when I am knee-deep in the muck. I lean on verses I have found to resonate with my lived experience: "Weeping may last for a nighttime, but joy comes in the morning" (Ps. 30:5b).

I became executive director of Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in January 2014. CPT's mission is building partnerships to transform violence and oppression. My work is administratively and financially supporting teams of trained, unarmed peacemakers to accompany local communities and nonviolent movement leaders in their struggle for positive social change in the context of lethal violence.

I have crafted circles of care: circles for mentorship and for prayer support, circles of healers and peers. My well may not be deep yet, but I can connect with those whose wells are.

Going only where invited by local partners, four long-term CPT teams are now at work. One is in northeastern Colombia rallying alongside subsistence farmers resisting displacement by multinational corporations. Another is in Hebron/Al-Khalil walking alongside Palestinian children who must cross through Israeli military checkpoints or face Israeli settler violence on their way to and from school. In northern Iraq (Kurdistan) we stand with displaced civilians denouncing cross-border bombing, learn from refugees, and challenge the extractive oil industry there that jeopardizes rural water availability and quality. On Turtle Island (an indigenous name for the North American land mass) we work alongside First Nations community mobilizations in Canada to stop environmental degradation and cultural devastation.

In addition to working in these specific contexts, CPT focuses on structural violence (oppression) prevalent everywhere. Using a popular education model, we provide intensive trainings that feature personality and group-dynamics analysis, address secondhand trauma, foster community building, practice conflict intervention and interpersonal resolution, study the history of social movements, do nonviolent direct action, and solidify a commitment to undoing oppression (racism, sexism, and heterosexism).

Connecting with companions in the quest

This work demands that we dig daily. We unearth rocks of violence and layers of oppression (external, internal, spiritual, physical), examining them and responding intentionally. It is demanding and drying. Though daunting, this work is what I want to do for the long haul, because it is in nonviolent social movements (liberation Christianity being one of them) where I feel

most alive. So as I started the position I crafted circles of care: circles for mentorship and for prayer support, circles of healers and peers. My well may not be deep yet, but I can connect with those whose wells are, or who are companions in the quest. So far doing so has resulted in a lot of joy on the journey. One circle of care is with other young leaders of color who meet periodically in Oakland, California (Ohlone traditional land).

Together we study with Joanna Macy, a social movement leader who grew up listening to Calvinist Christian preachers. Her ministry is facilitating powerful transformative grief work, sitting with and moving through the suffering of our planet in this critical time. Sustained through five decades of activism, she is an eco-philosopher and a scholar of engaged Buddhism, systems theory, and deep ecology. Accompanying her in leading our study is Patricia St. Onge, a Mohawk grandmother and community organizer who is an expert in deep culture work, for it is through cultural manifestations of values, beliefs, and ethics that humans express the desire to survive and thrive.

Reconnecting with each other and with all beings

The process we engage in is about reconnecting ourselves with each other and all beings, arousing our passion for life and our power to protect it. In the book *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World,* Macy articulates an active hope. This hope is a component in the type of joy that can help us face the mess we are in—personally, communally, religiously, (inter)nationally, familially—without drying up. The process includes coming in gratitude, honoring our pain, seeing with new eyes, and going forth.

It is tempting to dry up because of the complicated issues we see within and around us each day. What does it mean to have joy at a moment when things are being done to the earth that cannot be undone?

It is tempting to dry up—to go crazy, or go numb, or close in—because of the complicated issues we see within and around us each day. What does it mean to have joy at a moment when things are being done to the earth that cannot be undone? In addition to our current CPT projects, there are opportunities for local groups to organize with CPT to learn about a specific issue. One CPT group in Indiana went to Tennessee to learn about the depleted uranium

stored in the ground there. The half-life of that radioactive poison is more than 4.5 billion years! And it is impossible to get it out of the ground. The use of earth as a supply house and a sewer raises hard questions about what justice—if any—is available for the earth and its people, and what it would look like in this context.

Coming in gratitude

The way we can avoid drying up (as in having no more tears to cry, or having our well of compassion and insight run dry) after learning about such horrible things is to approach the situation in gratitude. What's needed is not a sentimental expression of cheeriness but a profound gratefulness for being alive at this moment in the universe. "Gratitude for the gift of life is the primary wellspring of all religions," Macy affirms.[2] Being thankful in all circumstances is a starting point from which to approach all challenges. One can be grateful to have been made aware of a situation and therefore able to empathize. I am attempting to reflect the meaning of the words written to the early church in Philippi: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). This baseline of grateful joy develops the muscles of compassion, which we need in order to have the courage to move toward situations of suffering and sorrow rather than away from them.

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Honoring our pain

Profound changes can "occur when we own and use, rather than repress, our pain for the world," Macy writes.[3] St. Onge offered the legendary story of the Great Peacemaker and the grief of Hiawatha. Without Hiawatha's honest reckoning of his immense sorrow, he would not have had the ability to broker the formation of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy for peace.

Honoring the pain I feel about the brokenness in myself and the world reduces the demobilizing grip it has on me. It is then I can ask the deepest questions that are within, and I can hear from others' experiences without comparing. I sit in the Oakland cohort as I have sat with comrades in Elkhart, Atlanta, Jerusalem,

and Rosario. We are all asking these questions. As common as these questions are through generations, this is an extraordinary moment in planetary life:

> *How do we collect the shards of our broken selves that have been flung far and wide by the impact of life's blows? How do we process individual and collective pains that have ripped apart our cores? How do we become whole after traumas that threaten to splinter our souls? Where do we find wellness, and to whom, or to what, do we turn when relief seems illusory?"*[4]

Reframing

Co-arising with the energy of compassion is the necessary tool of insight. Insight from scripture, science and scholarship, our lives, and religious and cultural traditions leads me from wallowing in the pool I can see toward deepening my well.

With insight we notice that the sorrow and anger we feel for ourselves, other humans, and the planet doesn't match the assumption that we are separate, independent beings whose happiness must often be secured at the expense of others. On the contrary, Macy taught us as we gathered as a cohort,

> *it is from our interconnectedness that feelings of pain for the world arise . . .*
>
> *As we allow the world's pain to flow in, it rearranges our internal structures. Then, on the outflow, our gifts of response release back into the world.*[5]

This is good news! Jesus was one who saw our connectedness to all things and blessed those who were scorned, torn, and mourned (Matt. 5:3–12). His tales of the kingdom of God constantly illustrated cosmic and societal reordering. His invitation was to people from all walks of life to begin that reordering by an acceptance of messianic consciousness and a sense of their oneness (John 17:22–23).

Acting exuberantly

For me, joy comes in daily rediscovering this honoring and framing of sorrow. Like a cup that runs over, I have much joy to share.

These understandings are not for myself only, nor am I the only one that understands! I gain energy from making connections between people, organizations, and movements that are open-heartedly doing healing work. In CPT, healing work takes personal, political, and spiritual forms. Joy is essential to leadership in this arena, as a lot of paralyzing forces can keep people from having courage, making a commitment, and cultivating the communities they need to sustain their faith-based activism.

Joy is essential to leadership in this arena, as a lot of paralyzing forces can keep people from having courage, making a commitment, and cultivating the communities they need to sustain their faith-based activism.

I must constantly return to the well of my deepest motivation to do this work. I must refill my cup—what one CPT colleague calls "a joy bucket." We can give well from an overflowing cup, even though surrounded by enemies or difficult circumstances (Ps. 23:5). But we cannot give well from a cup that is not full; if we try, we will get depleted.

Cultivating joy within as a discipleship practice

It may seem that cultivating joy within as a discipleship practice is a small action, with marginal effect on the world. In my imagination, I hear Jesus speak to this by reflecting on his theological encounter with the "marginal" Samaritan woman at the well whose response to a well-deepening conversation shook up her world and her town (John 4). In their conversation they travelled through what Macy calls "the spiral of the work that reconnects": beginning with gratitude, naming pain and brokenness, reframing (in this case, understandings of the Messiah), and acting exuberantly on the information. Here is my response in parable:

> *The kingdom of God is like a woman who found water in a dry place. She arrived in that land by the path of following her heart. She knelt to the ground, and her last tears fell from her eyes and sweat from her back. While others said, "There is no nourishment to be found here," she watched as her water flowed and pooled and sank back into the earth. She began to dig. She dug through layers of clay, sediment, and stone, the earth growing cooler and damper as she reached lower. Covered in dust*

and thrust core-ward by a grief determined to be heard and healed, she found the waters of joy, drank deeply, and was nourished. She was filled enough to cry again—they were tears of joy. And almost all who saw her rejoiced with her.

More than ever we need people who through great sorrow and by other paths have found their way to becoming alive. The challenges we face as a species and as a planet require that all of us play our part in making a difference. One thing I inherited from those visits to elders was practice in talking with anyone, of any age and background, convinced that everyone has a treasure or a story to share, even if it is some peanut-brittle idea that I do not like.

I could tell that the summer visits to older Christian sisters and brothers filled my mother's joy bucket. I appreciate her example and the example of many others who intentionally engage in life-sustaining activities that knit us together as a species across lines of difference, multiplying joy in the face of forces that seek to disrupt and deny our connections with one another. This engagement reflects one of the core values of the movement that gathered around Jesus. It characterizes the renewal he pointed to, the revelation he embodied, and the revolution he called for—joyously!

Notes

[1] Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* (Stony Creek, CT: New Society Publishers, 1998), 15.
[2] From Joanna Macy on "The Great Turning"—"the shift from the industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilization"; http://www.joannamacy.net/thegreatturning.html.
[3] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 5.
[4] "Angela Davis and Toni Morrison / How do we become whole . . . after traumas that threaten to splinter our souls? On literacy, libraries, and liberation," *The Liberator Magazine*; http://weblog.liberatormagazine.com/2011/06/angela-davis-and-toni-morrison-literacy.html#.U6mytPmwLFY.
[5] Macy and Brown, notes from cohort meeting, April 13, 2014.

About the author

Sarah Thompson is from Elkhart, Indiana (Potawatomi traditional land) and is the executive director of Christian Peacemaker Teams. She is a 2006 graduate of Spelman College (Atlanta, Georgia) and 2011 MDiv graduate of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Indiana). Formative experiences for her as a young adult include work in southern California (2013), Jerusalem (2011–12), Mennonite Voluntary Service (2007–8), and Mennonite World Conference (2004–9).

Sing my heart joyful art

Carol Ann Weaver

Joy is not something you find by looking for it. It is not a commodity, available on request, received as payment for labour, or earned by our efforts. Joy may come to us through unjoyful events—an extraordinary loss, an honest glimpse into our dysfunctions, a breakdown, a tragic death, a failure to obtain what we thought we deserved, when only a miracle can heal.

Joy can find its way to us against all odds, shattering our cynicism with wonder, melting anger into forgiveness, turning pain into marvel, doubt into belief, and discontent into amazement.

When joy catches us up, we hear it like the first call of a migrating spring warbler. We accept its vibrant song, are carried by its forgiving wings, become free of our moorings, and know we have received a gift that cannot be contained or bought or explained or deserved. We call this a miracle.

Joy can find its way to us against all odds, shattering our cynicism with wonder, melting anger into forgiveness, turning pain into marvel, doubt into belief, and discontent into amazement.

But there are ways to welcome rather than fear joy's journeys and challenges; there are ways to be attentive to it, to open ourselves toward receiving it. The channels through which it may come, the paths that must be taken, the isolation and honesty sometimes required, may resemble the dark night of the soul rather than the bright light of happiness.

When I was not yet two, my father, Melvin Weaver, was killed in a plane accident. My mother, Miriam L. Weaver, had "Lift your Glad Voices" sung at his funeral, showing us how to reach out for joy in the midst of tragedy. This response lives within me.

I have repeatedly gone to music not to seek joy but to find a way toward its discovery, in whatever forms that may take. Writing music has been for me a form of meditation, a kind of

prayer without words, a place where I go in order to see without eyes, hear without ears, and feel without emotions. Writing music is a place where joy may be revealed, but rarely without the attendant release of burdens; the surrender to healing; and the quest for vision, honesty, and forgiveness. In a time of extreme pain I wrote "Dancing, Dancing River" to provide a needed mantra for my life.

There is a river a flowing for me
There is a river a for you
There is a river for everyone,
Come to the dancing, dancing river.

I wanted love, joy, peace, empowerment, dignity and worth. But first:

Come lay your burdens upon the sea,
Come lay your burdens down forever
Come let your burdens float down the stream
Come to the dancing, dancing river.[1]

Listening deep for the original jive of freedom

Sometimes as children we reach the purest joy, unobscured by angst or complications. Possibly my first musical joy (besides hearing my mother's soft voice singing lullabies, or her unswerving alto at church) was my grandfather playing Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite* on the phonograph as I rode my kiddy car faster and faster around on the linoleum floor, in time to the music. For me, joy was in the movement of music—nothing to resolve or desire, no doubts lurking, no forgiveness to be sought. All was whole, loved, and received as sheer gift.

Later, while riding my tricycle down the sidewalk, I heard a sound that compelled me to race into the house. The only music in our Mennonite surroundings was a cappella singing and classical music from Grandpa's rich 78-cum-33 collection. Ragtime, jazz, rock 'n' roll, or popular music was turned off immediately whenever it came on the radio, stuck between news and the weather. But here was ragtime coming from *our* piano. I had never heard anything so happy, liberating, upbeat, invigorating. Joy had come via the forbidden rag—the black-keyed version of "Chopsticks"! This was a joy I didn't know existed, like an exotic new

fruit. My favourite hymns, march-like and athletic, such as "Onward, Christian Soldiers" or "We're Marching to Zion," compelled and commandeered. But ragtime, stemming from the most poignant of pasts, stirred up within me new synapses—resplendent and rollicking. Many years later I discovered I could still be a Mennonite and play jazz and teach it at a Mennonite college! When I compose music, I listen deep within for that original jive of freedom, that intoxicating joy of release so vividly remembered from "Chopsticks"!

The first jazz-inflected song I wrote rode with me all the way from Virginia to Manitoba. As I sang it nonstop during the twenty-four-hour drive, my questions evaporated, my fears dissipated, and my angers melted into love. "Greeting Song,"[2] sung in multiple gatherings and performances, brings joy to "brothers, sisters, meadows, oceans, the planet, every creature."

Lured by the crazy symmetries of African art

Somewhere in my twenties I was lured by the crazy symmetries of African visual art and traditional music, and pulled by heart-rending South African freedom songs, knowing my life was gradually moving toward Africa. My role model, Aunt Esther Lehman, had already loved Africa thoroughly and actively, taking college students to Ethiopia on what must have been their first African study term,[3] and she later spent a year teaching teachers in Botswana. On her return, she sat me down at the piano and made me, against my will, play through "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" (now part of South Africa's national anthem), her warbly soprano wending pathways through the Zulu wordscape. The song caught in my throat. Within it I heard the pain of people living in bondage who were somehow finding joy in the smallest fragments of hope. When I was first able to travel to South Africa, still under apartheid, and see dilapidated shacks and hovels, I was surprised to see flowers painted on some of the outside walls. Even through pain and oppression, people were expressing a joie de vivre. I wanted to know more.

Writing music is a place where joy may be revealed, but rarely without the attendant release of burdens; the surrender to healing; and the quest for vision, honesty, and forgiveness.

I went to Africa to discover something about joy. Despite racial, ethnic, cultural, national differences, many Africans, continentally, seem to share a common musical buoyancy. How could they dance their music into sound, again and again? How could the continual frustrations of poverty, health problems, political crises, ongoing wars, family separations, and near-impossible living conditions bring forth music, which expresses the epitome of joy? My Xhosa friend Prince Bulo explained what my mother also understood: "Our music is joyful so that we can embrace our sorrows." In Africa I invariably feel this joy, thicker than granite, lighter than air, stronger than steel, more flowing than water.

I was in Kenya for a year of research, musical exposure, writing, and composing, along with my husband Lyle Friesen and our daughter, Myra. Our first venture out to hear Benga Beat[4] music was prefaced by searing questions: To whom do we entrust our two-year old? How do we get there? Will we be safe? Seconds after Myra fell asleep, cared for by our Luhya friend Kargeyha, our taxi arrived. Lyle and I rode with fear and questioning. Was Myra OK? Would we be mugged? Were we safe?

My Xhosa friend Prince Bulo explained what my mother also understood: "Our music is joyful so that we can embrace our sorrows."

When we arrived at Nairobi's famous Bombax Club, we were the only white people there. Fear was instantly erased as we were welcomed and offered two of the precious few chairs in the crowded, smoky room. The music was utterly transporting—lithe, multilayered, ethereal, throbbing, earthy, transcendent. I had never felt a wall of joy like the one that came from those musicians and that exuberant crowd. When two women asked me—a shy Mennonite for whom dancing was next to ungodliness—to dance, I had no choice. Before I knew it, I was pulled into the sway of the crowd, which moved to the music as one body. Communion. I had never experienced anything so unabashedly joyful. We danced for hours. The glow never left!

A few months later we drove our tired and untrustworthy Fiat to Kenya's Meru Game Park for a safari, singing Christmas songs to the lions and cheetah. On leaving the park, the front wheel broke off the axel. There we were, only a few paces outside this

wilderness park where animals roamed freely, and many miles from the main highway. Our car was irreparably broken; we were trapped. We couldn't walk to the highway before dark, nor were we safe staying with a broken-down car after dark. Instinct taught us that *we* could not break down. We couldn't even talk. But for Myra, blissfully oblivious to lurking danger, this was an adventure! We rigged up a blanket shield against the relentless sun, and we waited. Hours went by—no vehicles. Then a Meru Park truck lumbered by, promising us a mechanic by the end of the day. We waited. Myra and I helped a Meru farmer weed her garden.

Finally at dusk, stranded there on that darkening road, we began to hear a distant sound of singing coming closer and closer—angels or mortals? When the truck appeared, thirty-some workers were standing on the back, singing their way home for the night, like saints marching home, creating a surprising moment of joy in the midst of perceived peril. Charles, mechanical genius (and saint), jumped from the truck, and with a handle-less saw, carved a necessary hole through a piece of hard metal to reattach the wheel. As he reassembled our car and drove with us toward the highway, we held our breath. Sure enough, it broke again, but his second fix held for the rest of the year. The angels had sung us enough joy to carry us home that night.

Learning to fly

Later on, I received that kind of musical joy firsthand, by playing music with African jazz musicians. At the turn of the millennium, well after the lifting of apartheid, we went to Durban, South Africa, locating in a cottage at University of KwaZulu Natal, and placing our daughter in a Catholic school across the road. I both feared for and envied her in a school with Zulu, East Indian, and only three white children. To allay my fears and assuage my guilt for bringing her across the globe, I wrote her "Learning to Fly," which acknowledged my own fears and the need to trust:

you may find some barricades stumbling up your joy
walking on your hopes and dreams
threatening to destroy.
Singing your sorrows
singing your pain
singing your heartbreaks

singing in the rain.
There may be some fear in you
hiding in your ride
there may be some risk involved
trusting the skies
there may be some wings in you
folded up inside
as you open up your hold
you may start to glide
as you open up your hold
you may start to fly.

Another song, "Beyond the Water," spoke of healing:

Carry me healing water
let me float in your tides
wash me still gentle rhythms
flowing out to join the sea.
Wash me gentle where I'm broken
where I've parted from my own way
let your currents carry laughter
laughing, shimmering across the bay.

Warm me gentle where I'm broken
where my journey has come away
melt me golden as the sunlight
golden laughter within my day.

All along, I felt I was waiting for Africa to unfold. Many appointments ended up with merely waiting. In the meantime, I went to dilapidated university practice rooms with broken windows, stuck piano keys, wobbly benches, missing door handles, and I eked out tunes and texts revealing my own waiting. In "Waiting Birth" I was waiting for a Mozambican timbila (marimba) to survive the great floods of 1999 and arrive in Durban. During this flood women gave birth in trees. Many people died. I was waiting for a kind of birth.

Sing my heart
shrouded art
rhythm slowly meting
waiting birth

touching earth
where my heart is beating

Mother earth
giving birth
as I give you greeting
You who hold
and enfold
secrets of my being.

Sing my heart
joyful art
rhythm slowly meeting
many sounds
touching ground
where my heart is beating.

Finally, the music came together. I was joined by East Indians—singer Natalie Rungan, jazz guitarist Mageshan Naido—and Zulus—drummer Lebohang Mothabeng, bassist Bongani Sokhela, and singer Thandeka Mazibuko—for my first-ever African concert, and later compact disc recording.[5] Cultural differences seemed to add a zest to our music, allowing for an exuberance I had only dreamed of. "Dancing, Dancing River" became our theme song. Joy bubbled as we brought our musical worlds together. Playing jazz with these Africans released me from the boundaries of classical music, allowing me to trust my new mentors. This journey would continue.

Cultural differences seemed to add a zest to our music, allowing for an exuberance I had only dreamed of. Joy bubbled as we brought our musical worlds together.

Finding subterranean joy through the pain

Surely not all journeys lead directly to bliss. Some must be taken in order to explore pain, loss, death, and sadness. But even in these difficult journeys, in the least expected times and places, I have often found a subterranean level of joy which can only be found through the pain.

In 2006, hearing that five Amish girls had been shot in a small schoolroom at Nickel Mines, near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, I was stopped in my tracks. How could these innocent, pure-minded

girls be taken so violently, without cause? I felt a grief for them as if my own daughter had been taken. And I grieved for their mothers, knowing their loss was searing and indescribable. A few years earlier I had created a large music drama, *Quietly Landed?*[6] which pulled together various Mennonite women's voices and featured Julia Kasdorf's poem "Floating on the Lobsang." In it she explains how these long tones of praise are sounded in each Amish service, whether for Sunday worship, weddings, or funerals.

I knew the Amish would forgive the killer, finding ways to reconcile his acts, while singing praise. So I wrote my own "Lobsang" (praise song) for the five Amish girls, which my singer friend Rebecca Campbell and I took to Lancaster the next year. My solo pilgrimage to the school site—the building itself had been razed—was a solemn event. While I stood there in the cool drizzle of a late October day, an Amish farmer rode by in his buggy. He didn't know me, but he knew *why* I was there—a brief moment of recognition and bonding, a wave of the hand, a sharing of love, an unexpected joy.

Joy is finding us in its own time, as we are able to release our hold on pain. While the pain of the leaving will never be forgotten, the joy of release remains a promise.

My most recent piece, "The Leaving," for soprano saxophone and piano, was composed in memory of a young nephew whose life was too heavy for his slender frame. His choice to pass up his life brought anguish and horrendous sorrow to those who knew and loved him. It took me almost two years to write this piece. First I listened for his voice, but time stopped, so I composed that sound. Then, as I listened, he seemed to be telling me he was happy and in a good place—we no longer needed to mourn. I called that part "The Release," knowing that the leaving was his, but the release was ours to do. It would be mockery to say that joy was a goal for this music. But I trust joy is finding us in its own time, as we are able to release our hold on pain. While the pain of the leaving will never be forgotten, the joy of release remains a promise—"the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."[7] On hearing this music, his mother told me she hadn't been that happy since his death.

We are all composing sounds, writing stories, creating images, divining pathways that may bring us closer to the mysteries of joy.

Though there are no guideposts, roadmaps, or protocols to assure us safe passage and sure arrival, we know we can always release our burdens to the dancing river. And the still, small voice of the spirit whispers to each of us, almost inaudibly and in languages yet unknown. In the end, the word *joy* may be too limiting for that release, that voice, that miracle!

Notes

[1] The song alludes to the river mentioned in Rev. 22:1.
[2] Published in *Assembly Songs* (Scottdale, 1983), recorded on *We Are an Offering* CD by Lifted Voices (Kitchener, ON), and recently sung by request on Easter Sunday 2014 at Rockway Mennonite Church, Kitchener.
[3] Esther Lehman taught at Eastern Mennonite College (now Eastern Mennonite University) in Harrisonburg, VA.
[4] An invigorating popular Kenyan dance music with vocals, twin guitars, horns, percussion, and bass, similar to Congolese soukous music.
[5] *Dancing Rivers—from South Africa to Canada* (2000) was recorded in Durban with these musicians.
[6] For the Quiet in the Land conference on Mennonite women at Millersville, PA, 1995.
[7] Heb. 11:1; KJV.

About the author

Carol Ann Weaver is an eclectic composer, performing pianist, and professor emerita of music at Conrad Grebel University College/University of Waterloo (Ontario), where she taught composition, theory, jazz, women and music, and African music. She also led student groups to South Africa. Her genre-bending music results in new fusions of roots and art music, often coloured by African music. Her seven CDs include songs for those whose stories speak of struggle and hope. She has directed three Sound in the Land festival/conferences on Mennonite music; the most recent one on music and the environment is seen at https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/sound-land-2014. Her book *Departure and Return* (Waterloo: Stonegarden Studios, 2014) gives perspectives on growing up in a Mennonite setting, leaving for Africa, and returning.

Accounting for joy
A sermon

Anita Yoder Kehr

It all started with one of those quotations that get attached as a thought-provoking after-thought in the signature field of an email message. I'm not even sure anymore where this one came from, but the attribution was to a "rabbinic text." It went something like this: "We will someday have to give an account to God for all the good things our eyes beheld that we refused to enjoy."

That's not what we usually think about when we imagine giving an account of our lives to God. At least I don't. I think more often about Matthew 25, where the sheep are divided from the goats on the basis of whether they've responded to need: to those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, or imprisoned. Or I think about the Sermon on the Mount, about whether I've governed my thoughts and behavior according to Jesus' ethic of self-giving love. I had never imagined the possibility of giving an account about whether I've enjoyed the good and generous gifts of God.

It all started with one of those quotations that get attached as a thought-provoking after-thought in the signature field of an email message: "We will someday have to give an account to God for all the good things our eyes beheld that we refused to enjoy."

I tracked down the source of this quote, and it does seem to be from a rabbinic text dating back to the fourth or fifth century.[1] It isn't scripture, but this rabbinical observation on our human duty to enjoy all the good things our eyes behold is, I think, compatible with scripture. Scripture is filled with exhortations to rejoice and be glad, to delight in God and in God's gifts. The psalmist writes: "Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion" (Ps. 65:1; NRSV). And there is no better way to praise God than to enjoy the gifts that God, in abundant generosity, gives.

Praise is due to you, O God—
praise flowing from a heart of recognition

and gratitude and joy.
We owe you praise because you answer our prayers.
You forgive our sin.
You bring us into your presence.
You deliver us from slavery
and into the freedom of salvation.
Praise is due to you for your power exhibited in all of creation.
Praise is due to you for the beauty you infuse
into the exquisite details of our world.
Praise is due to you, O God, for your sustenance,
for the rain that waters the earth,
for the sun that nourishes it,
for the abundance of your provision.
Praise is due to you, O God, for human love,
for the relationships you knit
among friends and family members,
forebears and progeny, by blood and by common faith.
Praise is due to you for our bodies,
for movement and growth and touch.
Praise is due to you, O God,
because in sorrow and suffering and pain, in the face of evil,
you do not abandon us
but walk with us through the dark valley,
the suffering of the cross
united with the life of the resurrection.
Praise is due to you, O God, for the movement of your Spirit
that enables us to walk in your way,
to delight in you,
to celebrate your good gifts.
Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion.

Protecting ourselves against wonder

There is a thirst in our world, I think, for delight and joy, and there is, at the same time, a fear of it. To delight in what we see, to enjoy the gifts we behold, is to open ourselves to wonder, to become vulnerable in a way that makes middle-class, educated North Americans uncomfortable. Our sense of safety rests to some extent in a cynical or skeptical view of the world: if we don't hope for anything, we won't be disappointed. Or we trust in our own

observation and understanding; what we can't dissect and intellectualize we put away as irrelevant.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, another rabbi (but this one from the twentieth century), wrote about radical amazement:

> *Among the many things that religious tradition holds in store for us is* a legacy of wonder. *The surest way to suppress our ability to understand the meaning of God and the importance of worship is* to take things for granted. *Indifference to the sublime wonder of living is the root of sin. . . .*
>
> *As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. [Humankind] will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. . . . What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder."*[2]

Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest and professor of religion, tells a story about the vulnerability of wondering enjoyment. She and a friend were walking on a fine spring morning across the campus of Georgia State University. As on most college campuses in the early springtime on particularly beautiful days, students had spilled out of the dorms and libraries and classrooms to enjoy the first warmth of the season. They filled the plaza with its flowing fountain where Taylor and her friend were walking and discussing deep, adult matters. "All of a sudden," Taylor writes,

> *my friend just snapped. He ran over to the water fountain, plunged his hands into it and drenched himself. Then he ran back to me, squealing like a five-year-old, and put his cold, wet hands on either side of my face.*
>
> *I was appalled, absolutely appalled. Everyone was staring. And I'll tell you the worst part. The worst part was that I wanted to throw a scarf over his head, because his face was so completely open, so utterly defenseless, that I could hardly stand to look at it. I didn't say it, but I thought it: "For heaven's sake, man, get hold of yourself! You've got to learn to protect yourself better than that. Think what could happen to you if you walked around letting everyone see who you are like that. You could get*

hurt! You could scare someone!" Now, all these years later, I wish I could find him and tell him that he was right and I was wrong. I wish I could tell him about Moses, who came down the mountain of the Lord with a face so bright that he wore a veil so he wouldn't frighten anyone."[3]

Enjoying the good gifts of God requires a certain vulnerability, a certain willingness to let go of constraint and simply experience the joy of the Lord. In these past few months, as these ideas about enjoying God and God's generous gifts have tumbled through my mind, I began to recall times when as a younger woman with little children, I'd sometimes twirl around our living room in sheer joy. I'd make sure that the curtains were all closed, that the children were all napping, and then I'd dance. Now you have to understand that I'm a klutz and that I would never do anything like that in public, not by a long shot. You might be the first people I've ever told about this. But it turned out that my twirling and reaching up was a way of giving the praise due to God, of expressing enjoyment in life. And as these memories returned—accompanied by blushes of embarrassment—I realized that it has been a very long time since I've danced. Perhaps my eyes have become blinkered to wonder, my heart more hardened to delight. It takes some effort to sustain wonder in a world such as ours.

And the plight of our world does invite us to consider the propriety of enjoyment. How dare we claim to enjoy gifts of God when evil seems to be running amok in genocide, in warfare, in poverty, and in plague? When selfishness and materialism seem to be governing our culture and seeping into our own selves? When distorted theologies suggest that accumulating wealth equates with accumulating spiritual blessing? How dare we focus on enjoyment? *How dare we not?*

Our reason for being: to glorify and enjoy God

In 1647, in post-civil war England, the Westminster Assembly drew up a "shorter catechism" of questions and answers as a tool for offering instruction in the faith for the common person. Still in use in some settings today, the first question goes like this: "What is the chief end of [hu]mankind?" And the answer is this: "[Hu]mankind's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy [God] forever."[4]

Enjoyment of God's own self is where we begin and where we end. It is precisely as we see and recognize and name God's presence with us that we find joy and learn to enjoy God even—and maybe especially—in the midst of all that is wrong in our world. We learn to trust in God's faithfulness and to rely on the hope that comes from believing that God's way and wisdom are far beyond our understanding. Joy comes when we learn dependence on our Creator and our Savior, even when we are only catching glimpses in times of chaos and suffering.

As we grow in love for God and for other people, we become more open to appreciate the beauty and the joys of this life and this world and also more open to its sorrow and brokenness.

Indeed, dwelling more and more consciously in the presence of God, enjoying God, enlarges and deepens our capacity both for joy and for sorrow. It's been said that as we grow in love for God and for other people, we become more open to appreciate the beauty and the joys of this life and this world and also more open to its sorrow and brokenness.[5]

As we enjoy God and God's gifts, we also find that we're called to share those gifts. We are being formed, in joy, to respond to the need of those around us: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the imprisoned. We are learning to live by the self-giving ethic described by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, to take our cross upon us because we *know* about the gift of the resurrection life. Our discipleship, even when it leads to sorrow and precariousness, becomes rooted in the joy that is found only in the presence of God. And our joy increases—our roots grow deeper—as we follow the way of God as lived and taught by Jesus and as enabled by the Holy Spirit. Disciples who exhibit only grim-faced duty, who refuse to enjoy the good gifts of God-given life, yield a curious witness: why would anyone want to join in the walk if there is no delight, no appreciation, no joy in a life of following Jesus?

Joy—and enjoyment—is both an act of will and a gift of God. It is a decision to *look* for all the good that God has given. It's a choice to *behold* God's presence in the world. It is an act of will to lay aside cynicism and skepticism and to cultivate wonder and

awe instead. But the choice, the decision, the act of will is all in response to the gifts of God: the gift of God's first loving us, the gift of God's presence with us, the gifts of God's good creation—including the created world and our human relationships, the gifts of the salvation of Jesus Christ and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Our praise is certainly due to you, O God!

Take joy!

The last time I met with my spiritual director, I shared the rabbinical quote with her, the one from the beginning of this sermon: "We will someday have to give an account to God for all the good things our eyes beheld that we refused to enjoy." I shared with her my further thinking about the difficulty and the discipline of first looking for what is good and right rather than what is evil and wrong. I told her about the difference it makes in my perspective when I can manage to enjoy the good in the created world, in my family, in my congregation, in our community. She thought for a moment and she said, "There's a poem that says some of the same things, something about 'take joy.' Fra Giovanni, I think."

I had never heard of this Fra Giovanni, but I returned to the office and did some searching, and I discovered that in 1513, on Christmas Eve, this priest, scholar, architect, and teacher had written a letter to a dear friend of his. Now let his letter be the end to this sermon, my invitation to you to behold and to take joy:

> *I am your friend and my love for you goes deep. There is nothing I can give you which you have not. But there is much, very much, that, while I cannot give it, you can take. No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in today. Take heaven! No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present little instant. Take peace! The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within our reach, is joy. There is radiance and glory in the darkness, could we but see. And to see, we have only to look. I beseech you to look!*
>
> *Life is so generous a giver, but we, judging its gifts by the covering, cast them away as ugly or heavy or hard.*

Remove the covering, and you will find beneath it a living splendor, woven of love by wisdom, with power. Welcome it, grasp it, touch the angel's hand that brings it to you.

Everything we call a trial, a sorrow or a duty, believe me, that angel's hand is there, the gift is there, and the wonder of an overshadowing presence. Your joys, too, be not content with them as joys. They, too, conceal diviner gifts.

Life is so full of meaning and purpose, so full of beauty—beneath its covering—that you will find earth but cloaks your heaven. Courage then to claim it; that is all! But courage you have, and the knowledge that we are all pilgrims together, wending through unknown country home.[6]

Notes

[1] Jerusalem Talmud, *Kiddushin* 4:2; cited in William E. Phipps, "The Plight of the Song of Songs," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42, no. 1 (March 1974), 84. The Jerusalem (or Palestinian) Talmud is a collection of rabbinic notes on the second-century Mishnah (Jewish oral tradition), compiled in Israel in the fourth or fifth century CE (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem_Talmud).
[2] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1959), 43, 46.
[3] Barbara Brown Taylor, "Surprised by Joy," *The Living Pulpit*, 5, no. 4 (October-December 1996), 16.
[4] The Westminster Shorter Catechism; available at http://www.shortercatechism.com/.
[5] From Gerald G. May, *The Awakened Heart* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 102.
[6] Fra Giovanni Giocondo, Letter to Countess Allagia Aldobrandeschi, Christmas Eve, 1513; available at http://www.gratefulness.org/readings/fra_giovanni.htm.

About the author

Anita Yoder Kehr is pastor of First Mennonite Church, Newton, Kansas. This sermon comes from her time of service with Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship in Goshen, Indiana. Anita lives with her husband, Bryan, in North Newton, Kansas.

A letter to readers of *Vision*

Arlo Frech

Dear People of Vision,

Last Tuesday, I drove into town to get a jar of pigs' feet and some coconut oil. We raise pigs here on the farm, of course, and after raising a piglet right on up to a hog, we like to enjoy as much of it as we can for as long as we can. But my good wife, Emma, draws the line at pigs' feet. She refuses to pickle them and won't even think about eating them. So I was in town, in Stemming, to buy some pickled pigs' feet and some coconut oil. Emma likes to put a little of that on her oatmeal in the morning, and I cannot figure out why. Anyway, when I got into Stemming, I saw my sister Dora. Dora is the pastor of our church—Christ Church, Stemming. I greeted her, of course. She said she couldn't stay and talk, because she had a meeting. Dora is the first pastor we've had who went to seminary, and it seems like a whole lot of what she does is go to meetings. Before she hurried off, Dora said that the Mennonites were doing an issue of *Vision* about joy.

Dora is the first pastor we've had who went to seminary, and it seems like a whole lot of what she does is go to meetings. Before she hurried off, Dora said that the Mennonites were doing an issue of *Vision* about joy.

We at Christ Church, here, have some familiarity with Mennonites. And with joy. It was my grandpa—Dora's, too—Marcellus Frech, who came up here from Tennessee and started the church. Grandpa Marcellus was Pentecostal Holiness, and in the 1940s, that was not a religion well represented in upper North Dakota and lower Manitoba; Stemming straddles the border between them. Grandpa did not feel at home in the churches around Stemming, though he was friendly with the mostly German people. Besides farming, Grandpa Marcellus ran a barbershop in Stemming, open on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons and Saturday mornings, so he got to know a good many of

the Stemming menfolk, and not a few of the women, who liked the way Grandpa Marcellus gave a shampoo and set a permanent. I imagine the men and women both enjoyed the way he talked, which was like warm molasses pouring over a ripe peach. And he listened to them. "Those folk were lacking in the joy of the Lord," he used to say. And one Sunday evening, in the city park, Grandpa Marcellus started the Joy of the Lord Pentecostal Church of Stemming.

When my father—Dora's, too—Bartimaeus Frech, took over from Grandpa Marcellus, he thought to bring about a bit more sobriety to our church. I believe this had something to do with our father's marrying our mother, a Manitoba Mennonite woman, Elvina Reimer, who had an import/export arrangement with Papa Bartimaeus. They would meet at the US/Canada border, between our house and the barn, where Papa handed Elvina a can of Guernsey cream, and she passed to him a bushel of corn and one of potatoes. In this handing and passing, their hands sometimes touched, and it seems they tasted joy. Anyway, Dora and I are here. And the Joy of the Lord Pentecostal Church became the First Old Mennonite General Conference Church of Stemming. That's where I learned the joy of the Lord. It was a different sort of joy, I guess, from what those folk in the Pentecostal church shouted out. But we sang some hymns in the FOMGC Church that made my soul soar, and Papa could preach the devil right out of a sinner. I know that was joy.

Then Dora, my sister, went off to seminary in Boissevain—at St. Julian's College of Holy Doctrine and Gregorian Chant. She has done a dump-truck load of good for our church, which she renamed Christ Church, Stemming. Some of the old folks, who still remember Grandpa Marcellus and Papa Bartimaeus, and my mother Elvina, find it hard to accept all this change. Gunda Thiessen complained that we're not biblical anymore, like we were when we were Mennonites. "Shoot," she said, "we may as well be Lutherans!" Dora told her that the Bible gets read in our church, and in Lutheran ones, more than it does in the Manitoba/North Dakota Mennonite archipelago. I don't know what *archipelago* means, and neither does Emma, but Gunda quieted right down. We're still hoping for the joy of the Lord at Christ Church.

I talked about all this with our closest neighbor, Gus Dobrinski. Gus raises Angus cattle and is given to drink, but he sometimes sheds light on things. I asked him about joy. He said, "Well, I don't really feel joy going to church or coming away from it. But I'm Catholic, and I know it's not about my own feelings. I know there's joy in the church, among all the folks, and in the bread and wine. You can't make up joy, no matter how loud you clap or play the guitar. The good Lord makes it and gives it, and even if I don't feel it, I share it."

I asked Gus about joy. He said, "You can't make up joy, no matter how loud you clap or play the guitar. The good Lord makes it and gives it, and even if I don't feel it, I share it."

Well, sometimes Gus isn't much help after all. But I've been enjoying the pickled pigs' feet and avoiding Emma's coconut oil. I pray that all of you will know the joy of the Lord, whether you feel it or not.

Your friend,
Arlo Frech

PS The Mrs. says "hello."

Resources for sustaining joy

Vision readers

As I worked with writers for this issue of *Vision* on the theme of joy, it became clear to me that we don't talk about this gift of the Spirit often or easily. Or at least we don't talk about it in a primary way often or easily. We talk about the joy of ministry or the joy of gardening, but joy is secondary to the topic. When it comes to joy itself, we are remarkably silent.

We sometimes include in *Vision* issues a review article or a resource listing on the topic of the issue. In lieu of a review article by a single author, I decided to ask subscribers to *Vision* whether there is a particular resource that nurtures their joy in leadership and ministry and whether they'd be willing to write a hundred words or so about it for the benefit of their fellow pastors and church leaders. I asked: "Is there a piece of music that you turn to? A poem? A particular writer? A practice or discipline? Is there a particular article that you have found helpful? A biblical passage? What generates or restores joy for you?"

Here are their responses.

—Mary Schertz

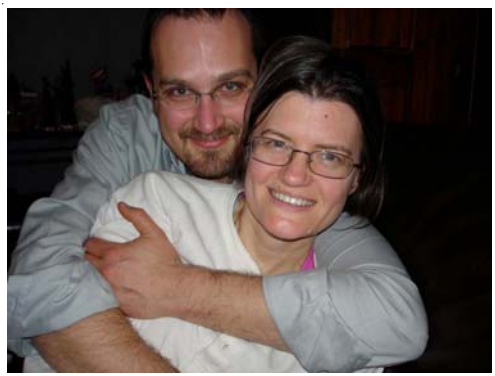
Restored by play

I am restored to joy when I play. For me, play can be sewing and working with colorful fabrics or coloring a mandala or creating a collage or using my paints and paintbrushes. All of these involve colors and physical engagement with a particular medium.

Playing removes me from the distractions of computer, Internet, and office. Play moves me from the critical and structured side of my brain to the intui-

tive and creative side. I am in a meditative space where I am more receptive to surprise and joy. I am more open and joyful. I feel restored *by* joy.

—June Mears Driedger (Lansing, Michigan)



Altars of blessing

"Everybody has a thing," my friend Christine said. "Do your thing." When I do my thing, I find my joy. When a stranger entrusts me with his or her story, I experience joy. Like Jacob, I build an altar to mark the spot. I return to recover my joy. Over time the joy grows deeper and richer. I look out over all the altars in my landscape and realize how blessed I have been. How often held in prayer, how many have reflected the face of the divine. Truly, God was in this place, and I did not know it.

—Kelly Carson, Bloomington, Indiana

Beauty sets the stage

Joy is an elusive emotion that calls me to go beyond myself, beyond circumstances or context to something bigger and greater. It cannot be forced but only invited to come.

For me, beauty is a key component that sets the stage for the possibility of joy to show up. Soaring music—such as "Gabriel's Oboe" from *The Mission* soundtrack, or George Winston's *Autumn* CD—is beauty in sound. Beauty in vision takes many forms, but I especially find it when I am surrounded by nature with all her many shades of color, smells, and textures. In nature, I find rest, renewal, and restoration, just as Psalm 23 declares.

A resource I have found particularly helpful is John O'Donohue's book *Beauty: Rediscovering the True Source of Compassion, Serenity, and Hope* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004). O'Donohue invites the reader to consider various forms of beauty for restoration and renewal, such as color, shapes that dance, imagination, attraction, the beauty of the flaw, and beauty and death. He also explores the call to beauty, where beauty dwells, and God as beauty. There are multiple small treatises exploring various aspects of each topic, which are excellent for personal prayer and reflection.

—Terri Geiser (Elkhart, Indiana)

Joy is

If you had been an observer of the driver of a red Ford Focus driving home to Newton, Kansas, from, let's say, Beatrice, Nebraska, at 10:00 p.m., after a meeting with the church council, you would have seen a conference minister singing at the top of her lungs to either the rock 'n' roll station on the radio (my fav) or the CD of *Sing the Story*. Great joy!

There are, of course, other moments of great joy. Reading (most anything) by Kathleen Norris, Barbara Brown Taylor, or Walter Brueggemann; listening to music, especially symphonic, organ, reggae, and women's voices. There are the delightful moments of grandchildren's remarkable honesty and those tender goodnights from a spouse. There are the comfort foods of Zwiebach and mashed potatoes, the guilty pleasures of Krispy Kreme doughnuts and Arby's chocolate turnovers. The joy of deep friendships that can resume on a moment's notice. The feel of a freshly washed dish and the smell of laundry just dried in the morning air. Great poetry and biblical psalms. Art created by friends and pieces displayed in Italian museums.

Joy is rest, a Sunday afternoon nap, and the lack of pain. Joy is vocation and vacation. Joy is.

—Dorothy Nickel Friesen (Newton, Kansas)

Children help me remember

I turn to children for restoration and refreshment! Just now I was singing a vacation Bible school song from this week: "I got the joy of Jesus!" Children bring out the joy in us as they marvel at commonplace occurrences and objects that we pass by every day. They bring the joy of laughter and lightness, as they don't know yet how to take themselves too seriously. And they bring the joy of being, as they are so obviously precious and (mostly) innocent. They help us remember that at our core we are each of us beloved children—not loved based on our performance or achievement. That is pure joy—the joy of being, being God's creature in God's creation, and letting that be enough. Children help us to remember.

—Matthew Insley (South Bend, Indiana)

On a river of joy

A resource for sustaining joy that immediately comes to mind for me is "Sing for Joy," the radio program started by Alvin Reuter, a Lutheran pastor in Iowa, now produced at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota. I first heard it on WAUS while studying at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Indiana), and have become a regular listener. It can be accessed online, but I usually tune in an AM station out of Sioux Falls that comes in clearly enough (most of the time) to listen in Mountain Lake on Sunday morning. The program plays sacred music featuring the biblical themes in the lectionary for each Sunday. When I'm using lectionary texts for preaching, listening to "Sing for Joy" is like a reward for doing my homework.

Hearing Gregorio Allegri's *Miserere mei, Deus* always brings joy through my ears. I hold my breath for the soaring soprano line. Another resource is *The Joyful Noiseletter*, publication of the Fellowship of Merry Christians. I enjoy these newsletters when they arrive in the mail, and I keep them in a couple of large three-ring binders. And yes, I pull them down and reread when I need more joy—and I also quote them in the church newsletter.

Jep Hostetler's book *The Joy Factor* is another I turn to. (Jep introduced me to the Fellowship of Merry Christians and their newsletter.) I am not sure I remember the exact wording of his statement, but it's something like: "You can be in a boatload of sorrow on a river of joy."

—E. Elaine Kauffman (Mountain Lake, Minnesota)

Puppies!

Is it too silly to write about the joy infusion that comes into my life when we have litters of Golden Retriever puppies? We have a litter right now, and caring for them is such a blessing and gift of joy.

—Jane Thorley Roeschley (Graymont, Illinois)

A gift of the Holy Spirit

In the book of Philippians, Paul teaches us from prison that we can have joy in spite of what we are going through or what we have been through. It does not matter where we are, who we are, or who we are with, because joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit that comes from the inside. Joy is produced by the Holy Spirit regardless of our circumstances.

The joy we are seeking only comes from being filled with the

Holy Spirit, so never allow sorrows or disappointments to cause you to forget for one moment the promise of Jesus our risen Savior, the promise to send us a Comforter—the Holy Spirit. Joy only comes from the Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed that our joy would be complete, and he promised that the Father would send us another helper to abide with us and make our joy complete. All you have to do to receive the joy of the Holy Spirit is receive the Holy Spirit.

How do you receive the filling of the Holy Spirit? The same way you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You ask and believe. The Holy Spirit responds to belief, just as Jesus did when we believed that he has saved us. We receive the Holy Spirit by faith. Faith only comes as we choose to believe the promises of God. The Holy Spirit is a promise: receive him. To be filled with the Holy Spirit means to be filled with the word of God. The Holy Spirit can only operate within the believer's knowledge of the word. The Holy Spirit renews our heart, but it is our responsibility to renew our minds. To be filled with the Holy Spirit means to be controlled by him. Being controlled by the Holy Spirit brings joy, peace and love.

Receive the Holy Spirit, if you want your joy to be complete!

—Dianna Graham (Elkhart, Indiana)

Joy motivates ministry

Joy for me is an elusive thing. I feel happy, ecstatic, fulfilled. Joy, however, never seems to come as a result of any ministry. For me, joy is not a result of anything, but it is a source of motivation to do the will of God in my life. Without the joy of my salvation by the grace of God through Christ Jesus, I have no reason to keep pursuing the means of ministry that I am pursuing. I draw off of the passage in 1 Peter 1:8–9: "Even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." For my walk, joy does

not come as a result of anything I do but because of what is now possible in me because of and through the grace offered by Jesus Christ on the cross. Because I have this new possibility, I can joyfully pursue the ministry God has for me, without worrying if I "fit the bill." It is by the grace of God that is with me that I can do what I am currently doing. This is my joy, my motivation, and my inspiration.

—Kevin Swartzendruber (Goshen, Indiana)