

This week, I was thinking about joy a lot, which is a little strange, being that I was writing Thursday's Blue Christmas service for the vast majority of the week. On Thursday, we had a service that gave space to the emotions of grief, sadness, and an acknowledgment of the heavy parts of this season. If you missed that service, I am happy to send you the notes from it. We often separate grief, sorrow, pain, and heaviness from joy, happiness, peace, and love. We see these as different sides of the same coin, and we can't feel them in a connected way. Chris and I were talking a few weeks ago about the joys and grief of moving to a new place. There is so much Joy. New people, new friends, new homes and communities, and new jobs. All of them are such beautiful, wonderful things. And there's the grief of moving away from your old people, old friends, old home, and community... Your life won't be the same after that point, and it won't necessarily be bad- it will just be different.

Even growing up can cause the strange joy and grief ... jief? groy?... phenomenon. My memories of childhood Christmas are overwhelmingly joyful. There were so many good memories of every year. My siblings and I would wake up way too early- Mom and Dad had to remind us that we couldn't come out of our rooms until the time started with a 6. My brother and I would pile into my sister's bed, and we would wait til 6 am. Then we would get to go to Mom and Dad's room! Mom and Dad then went to get coffee and make sure Santa had been to our house. As an adult, I realize they really just needed 10 minutes to drink coffee without us being monsters. Anyway, once we were allowed to come out of their room- we could sit on the stairs. Dad took a picture of us every year. Yes, even now... we have to find a staircase and send a picture to Dad. Then- and only then- we could race down the stairs and open our stockings from Santa. Then, Dad would hand out gifts, one at a time, and Mom would watch or help. I'm quite sure we were always done by 6:45 am. I had no idea when my parents slept for the first 10 years of our lives. In looking back on all of those incredible memories, all the joy and happiness, they are tinged with just a little grief. I obviously don't live at my childhood home anymore, my Christmas mornings are quite a bit less magical; the day is spent on Zoom or Facetime with my family as we unwrap the package my parents send and the stockings are filled with socks from Santa instead of small gifts or toys. It's still joyful, it is still happy and wonderful- but it is different. Though, quite honestly not a moment of grief is from the socks... I LOVE getting socks for Christmas. But the childhood joy isn't the same.

There is a disney movie that shows this emotion perfectly. Have yall seen Inside Out? Here are the characters... Joy, Sadness, Anger, Disgust, and Fear. They are all of Riley's (that's her) Emotions and they are trying to get Riley through a particularly rough situation of her parents moving to San Francisco when Riley is 11. They've officially moved, and her mom is talking to Riley about her favorite part of the trip down to San Fran. Watch this very short clip... [[VIDEO]]

I have never seen a more perfect explanation of becoming an adult or a person who goes through major changes in their life. By the end of the movie, they learn that the emotions all have to work together to get Riley through her day-to-day life. If you haven't seen it, please do!

That cast of blue sadness is a perfect explanation for looking back on my childhood Christmases. But a memory that is absolutely bright yellow, full of joy, is last year- standing right here next to Scott while yall lifted your candles for Silent Night at the end of our Christmas Eve Service... absolutely breathtaking. Make sure yall come this year because it will be just as stunning.

This weird emotion of grief and joy- I think I've settled on it being called jeif... this weird emotion is so important. Because it is the moment that God stands with us. We don't need to be *happy* to experience joy. God is bigger than that need. We can feel Joy in so many ways. We see this same jeif in scripture:

Psalm 126: 5-6

5

May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.

6

Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.

Sowing in tears, reaping in shouts of joy... going out weeping, coming home in joy... that's jeif if I've ever seen it. They just didn't have the movie *Inside Out* to name it yet. This feeling of squishing joy and grief or general sadness all together is one that we've all likely experienced.

When talking about the Blue Christmas service, a lot of yall said, "No thanks, I don't want to be sad!" And I fully appreciate that honesty. There is a lot of thought put into willingly walking into a sad situation, and accepting that All the feelings are going to come, not just Joy. I imagine the world right now feels like it's already filled with heavy feelings. To be asked to rejoice and celebrate in the midst of all of it may feel impossible. But it also may feel like exactly what you need.

Isaiah 35: 1-2 says:

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus, it shall blossom abundantly  
and rejoice with joy and shouting.  
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
They shall see the glory of the Lord,  
the majesty of our God.

In this passage, the Israelites are traveling to the promised land after their exodus. They have plenty to be worried about, to be questioning, and to be sad about. But, then there is the joy

in all of it. The editor of Presbyterian Outlook, Teri McDowell Ott, says it this way: “Unlike their exodus journey, this pilgrimage is marked with rejoicing; the desert crocus blossoms beneath their feet, waters and streams quench the thirsty land, the burning sands are cooled as the people sing their way home, praising God.

The trials of the people in Isaiah 35:1-10 are not over. The enemies that surround them are real and powerful. But the message of seeking joy during suffering is meaningful no matter where we are on our journey.”

That’s the part I really love about Terri’s commentary on this passage, “The message of seeking joy during suffering is meaningful no matter where we are on our journey.” On Thursday I said that one part of my particular grief is that I hold too many things that are not mine to hold. As my therapist lovingly put it, I’m a *fixer*. I try to fix everything for everyone and that just can’t be the case. Because then, I get home and I’m burned out from trying to fix everything that I can’t be present in my life. I’m not telling you to feel joy regardless of anything else happening in your life. I am not saying that you have to push everything to the side and let joy be your main emotion.

Most everything I read this week in preparation for Blue Christmas and this morning said a very similar message “If you’re not feeling Joyful right now, that’s Okay. God is still with us.” In the middle of a terrifying situation, where the life of Mary, Jesus and all children of that time were threatened- as Herod had found out about a king being born and vowing to stop it... in the middle of that terror, Mary still found joy. She was overwhelmed with joy to be carrying the Son of God. She sang of the joy and hope she felt in the months before his birth. Even in all the difficulty, God has done great things for us and will continue to do great things for us. We know that to be true because our scripture speaks to that truth.

Isaiah 40: 28-29 says:

**28**

Don’t you know? Haven’t you heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the creator of the ends of the earth.

The Lord doesn’t grow tired or weary.  
God’s understanding is beyond human reach,

**29**

giving power to the tired  
and reviving the exhausted.

In this season of true Joy, even if it is tinged with grief or heavy feelings, let God hold that phenomenon. There is joy to be felt and love to be shared in this season. God’s understanding is beyond human reach. We don’t have to understand it all. Take the jeif as it comes. And when you can, take the joy 10 fold. Share it with those around you who are struggling in different ways. When you feel the joy, thank God and each other and when you feel the heaviness, turn to God

and each other. Finally, when you feel that Jeif- sit with it for a while with God. They are big enough to hold it all.

Please pray with me- Creator, you're the one who brings us love and joy, and you're the one that holds all our complicated feelings even when we make up words for them. You are stronger than we can possibly imagine and your understanding is beyond our reach. Help us sit with the highs and the lows of Joy. Help us see where you're working and moving in our lives and in this world. God, we ask for for your presences with us in joy this week. Amen.