

Sunday May 22, 2022

First Lesson: Revelations 21: 10, 22-22:5

Gospel Lesson: John 14: 23-29

Sermon series: Fruits of the Spirit: Joy Effect

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We are continuing with our second week of our new sermon series Fruits of the Spirit, which is based off of Galatian 5: 22-23, that names the fruits of the Spirit to be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control;

- Where the idea is that now that you and I have been doing weeks of spiritual pruning together in our previous sermon series, so that we might grow in our faith and spirituality; my preaching goal in this sermon series, is for us to take each spiritual fruit, and examine them weekly, so that we can ensure that they keep growing to their full potential in our lives and the community that surrounds us.

- So this week, we are going to look a little closer at the budding fruit of joy in our lives.
- And I have to tell you that in our Wednesday class, *Applying the Sermon to Life*, which I am pleased to say is growing every week; we had a great discussion on this topic of joy.
- So I gave our group some homework after the class, to help me preach this sermon this morning;
- For as a side note, if you are tuning in this worship space or online for the very first time, I would like to take some time to share with you that what is most unique and special about this place called First United Methodist Church of Lincoln, Nebraska;
- Is that we aspire as a community, to fully embody and embrace what it means to love one another, which helps us that much further to know what it means to love God;

- For God is love—and our awareness as we debriefed the message that I preached last week on the love effect, is that since you and I are indeed created in the image of God; what this means for our lives is that it is up to you and I to show this love;
- It is up to you and I to be this beacon of love;
- For since Jesus has ascended back to be with the Triune God Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer; the reality is that the only tangible example of what these fruits could look like is through us!
- So the homework that I assigned our group in this class was to think of what cultivates true joy in their lives?
- And some of the responses that I received from the group were as follow:
- True joy is holding a sleeping new born baby;

- True joy is JRR Tolkien. Tolkien had a word he used: “eucatastrophe”. In his definition, eucatastrophe meant “joy beyond the walls of the world.” There are multiple examples of eucatastrophe in his books, but the example I think fits best is when the character Sam in “The Return of the King” is asked after the successful completion of the quest how does he feel?
- “How do I feel?” He cried. “Well, I don’t know how to say it. I feel, I feel”—he waved his arms in the air—“I feel like spring after winter, and sun on the leaves; and like trumpets and harps and all the songs I have ever heard!”
- Exactly! I think that is what joy is like. Or eucatastrophe. It is tough to describe, but it is an overwhelming feeling of contentment. And it is often the result of perhaps brilliant but simple things. Here are some things that, like Sam, bring joy to my life:

- True joy is a brilliant sunrise or sunset
- True joy is the northern lights or the Milky Way
- True Joy is a wood thrush or white throated sparrow singing during a hike in the woods.
- True joy is holding a cup of coffee during those initial moments of Christmas morning with all the family gathered around the Christmas tree;
- True joy is a deep, deep blue sky or a deep, deep blue Lake Superior.
- True Joy is Cindy looking at her Temperance River;
- And then Cindy wrote:
  - I'm like Mike where being in Minnesota along the North Shore of Lake Superior. When I'm there near the lake or in the north woods, my heart fills with joy. It's so beautiful there that it takes no effort at all.

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- Temperance River is in MN and Mike knows I need to see it every year. I was overwhelmed with tears that it brings him joy to see me experience joy when I arrive on its banks.
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- However, other times I have to be more intentional to awaken or uncover joy. If I'm out walking in a place that's not so profoundly beautiful, I make an effort to notice and ponder on less obvious sources of natural beauty. I try to fan the flames of joy in my heart.
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- Joy comes easily when I hold a newborn baby or tap a balloon back and forth with a pre-schooler.
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- However, I've noticed that I need to be more aware of sources of joy. I need to stop and grasp how wonderful it is to play a game with my adult

children, to have deep relationships with my friends, and to have quiet moments during the day to ponder the wonder of God.

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- Overall, I'm grateful for the unbidden moments when joy surges in my heart. But, I'm also trying to cultivate more joy in my life by awakening my awareness of God, beauty, and love in everyday moments.

- One of our group members wrote in regards to the topic of joy: " I've been thinking of the question you asked at last night's group about what brings us joy and I must say I'm not sure I even know what joy is.
- I have felt happiness in situations.
- I'm not sure about joy though.

- If I were to give any answer to the question I would say that acknowledging and cultivating the spiritual thirst I have felt for so many years brings me something more lasting than just happiness can bring. Happiness can be fleeting and situational, joy is all-encompassing and can last if we only tend to it.
- Coming to First United Methodist and meeting the few people that I have met, along with the groups I have been to on Wednesday evenings has brought me more joy in this small amount of time (a few weeks) than I have felt in my entire 44 years on Earth.
- Denying God, pretending as if there was no higher power, along with feeling unloved by anyone or anything for so many years left me with such a hole in my heart. I tried to fill it with food, sex, alcohol, anything I could think of, but the only thing that has truly started to heal me is



the feeling and the absolute certainty that there is a spirit, or higher being, that loves me more than I could ever fathom.

- I finally know why I am on this Earth. For so many years mental illness and negativity made me want to end myself, and in a way I did kill myself on the inside. This beautiful place and the people here, along with help from a special man in my life, have made me WANT to live in a way I've never felt before. True love, unconditional in any way, is the purest gift I have been given and the joy I have discovered has changed my life in ways unimaginable.
- Wow....I don't know about you but I am feeling chills in an amazing way, hearing so intimately from our group members on this topic of joy.
- I encourage you all to think about what cultivates true joy in your own lives as well and

if you feel so lead to share it with me, I would be happy to read your thoughts.

- However where I would like to pitch my sermon this morning, is by echoing one of our group participants in her acknowledging that there is indeed a difference between being happy and having joy.
- For happiness in my life experience is typically situational, where as joy is eternal;
- Perhaps this is what the psalmist meant in Psalm 30:5 when he said, *Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning;*
- For it is joy that allows you and I to be able to move through the trials and triumphs in our lives, with this inner knowing that everything will work itself out;
- It is joy that allows us to keep working on areas of mental health and wholeness, with the

understanding that greater days are indeed ahead of us;

- It is joy that allows us to move through our setbacks and disappointments in our lives, with an understanding that these moments do not define our entire lives;
- This and more is what I call the joy effect;
- It is that awareness within us that comes through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness; that informs us that our latter will be greater than our former.
- It is the wisdom that teaches us that there is always a solution within the midst of even the most difficult problem;
- It is this inner assurance of knowing that God has a greater plan for our lives; plans for us to prosper and not for our harm; plans that reveals to us a greater hope and a future for our lives.  
(Jeremiah 29:11)

- Furthermore how the scriptures this morning fits into our conversation starting with Revelation which we have been in for a couple weeks now is talking about the city of Jerusalem;
- However placing this scripture in every day terms; It must be kept clearly in mind what the city stands for and what is being described.
- You see one must not think of a city—certainly not of a material city—and not of a place or location to which the saints go and where they will dwell eternally.
- The city in our text today is talking about the people, in the same sense that we speak of the Church, as the people united in Christian fellowship and worship.
- So in our scripture this morning, we are painted with a vision of ultimate joy, when the people come together in their light and love;

- The word tells us that this light will be so magnificent that the city will no longer have the need of sun or moon to shine in it; for the Glory of God is its light and its lamp is the lamb. (V22)
- So as I make some connections with what we are striving to do here at First through our ministries and fellowship, is to create a space where people feel safe enough and loved enough to be able to share their light.
- We are striving through small groups and training opportunities, to walk along side people, to teach them how to share their gifts and most importantly, to let them know that their light is beautiful!
- Regardless if someone's light is different or unique, I am here to say that this ministry is ready to see your light and bask in your light.
- For as our scripture informs us, the city can be quite brilliant.

- What our scripture is telling us this morning is that the people's light in all of its different frequencies and hues—it's potential is beautiful.
- For when we come together in this light per our scripture, this is when the imagery of this tree of life is restored in all of its infinite glory.
- Our scripture provides us with imagery of a river, where on either side of it, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, keeps producing fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of nations.
- Therefore, it is up to the Church, who is still hands down the only entity in my mind, that can keep this vision before the people; to keep cultivating the grounds as our groundskeeper in our previous barren fig tree story; to ensure that this tree of life can grow to its fullest potential.

- **Looking at our gospel this morning, it is also naming an important truth for the Church, because although what I am preaching may seem ideal and even inspiring, the reality is that the task at hand is very challenging.**
- Because the truth of the matter is that we live in a world that does not always affirm the light within every human being that walks this Earth.
- In our earlier class, Journey through the Bible in a Year, we were talking about Hannah in the Bible who was barren and desperately wanted a child; this story can be found in 1 Samuel 1.
- This conversation opened up a very meaningful discussion regarding the plight of girls and women in particular in our world, whose light if I am honest, does not feel as if it is being affirmed or even noticed for that matter.

- For no matter where we stand, as it pertains to issues surrounding reproductive rights and other issues that affects our wives, daughters, grandchildren and more;
- I would be remiss if I did not name that these are very scary and uncertain times to be a woman in our society today.
- The issues that women and girls have to deal with are not black and white... they are complex,
- For each girl and woman has a story that needs to be heard and valued in all of its complexities and circumstances.
- Therefore, this group that meets at 4:15, are discerning ways where we as a community can provide a listening space for the girls and women and families of this community; so that we can come together and listen in a safe space, converse in a safe space and explore



ways where the light of our girls and women in particular are not extinguished out.

- So stay tuned for this important conversation, that will probably be in a form of a further extensive church wide study of scripture, lead by myself and participants who feel called and ready to have these types of discussions.
- Furthermore, I had the privilege of sharing a similar speech with a local non-profit organization called GirlPowr.
- It was an amazing event that gathered non-profits and business owners together, with the intent to raise money for girls education both locally and globally, so that these girl's light can shine in all of its infinite glory.'
- Therefore getting back to our gospel this morning, I believe that issues like these and more, is why Jesus is having these parting words with his Disciples.

- For if you notice in the rhetoric that Jesus chooses at this important time of his ascension, he is not speaking in a parable;
- Jesus on the contrary, is giving plain speech that anyone with ears can understand.
- That lets us know that although Jesus will not be amongst us in the living flesh until it is deemed time for him to come again.
- Until then, Jesus is naming an Advocate, the Holy Spirit who will always be accessible to us all; to help lead us and guide us into being able to share our light in a world ,that desperately needs to see and feel it.
- You see as I paraphrase our gospel this morning, Jesus is naming to the disciples then and to us disciples now, do not be troubled;
- And don't get me wrong Church, there were some things about which the disciples had good reason to be troubled.

- The Jewish authorities for instance had sworn to kill Jesus. Jesus had intimated on several occasions that He would soon die.
- Judas had deserted the band of disciples, and Peter had been charged with unfaithfulness.
- Their own safety, as well as their future, was uncertain. But most serious of all, there was the possibility that their faith in Jesus would prove to have been futile after all. Perhaps Judas had taken the best way out.
  
- So I'll say it again, the disciples then had good reason to be troubled.
- Friends and family, we have good reason to be troubled;
- For there are days where I don't even want to look at the news, let alone read the news, for I am not certain what tragedy or catastrophe may be revealed.

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- However even in this reality, Jesus is still leaving these words with us all..Do not be troubled for God is still with us, in the midst of all of the social/world issues that we are working our way through together;
- The Advocate is still with us, through the dark times of mass shootings and lost lives;
- The Advocate is still with us in the midst of our education crises and formula shortages for our babies;
- The Advocate is still with us, ready and willing to unlock and activate the light within us;
- The Advocate is still with us and ready to teach us how to come together as the city that we are;
- To come together as the people that we are;
- The Advocate is still with us, to show us how to penetrate the darkness with our light, which does require a measure of faith from you and I,

to no longer shy away from the circumstances that are in our midst;

- The Advocate is still with us; ready for us to draw strength from in our weakness; eager for us to draw confidence from in our uncertainty;
- All we have to do together is to take that first step, and place our trust in the Presence that will let us know that somehow, somewhere things will work itself out;
- Even if all we have is a mustard seed, that is all that is really needed to say to this mountain, move from here to there and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." For Ephesians 2:2 reminds us that, "Our God is able to exceedingly and abundantly above all we ask or think;
- So it is in this discovery that we learn to live into and lean into through service, small group study and fellowship, prayer and worship and more;

this is where our true joy begins to cultivate  
within us;

- For our light has been activated together,  
illuminating the tree of life in all of its brilliance!
- Let everyone with breath this morning praise the  
Lord of Light who is good and faithful to us!
- Amen!