

## March 5, 2017 First of Lent

### Introduction:

In the Sermon on the Mount, **Jesus** declares unequivocally:

**God** gives **God's** best to everyone: the sun to shine, the rain to refresh, the soil to supply nourishment. God gives unstintingly, always and everywhere, generosity without end.

### *So what blocks our joy?*

Vicki and I have been reading The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World. It is based on the weeklong visit, in April 2015, to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, to celebrate His Holiness's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Throughout the week they looked back on their long lives to answer a single burning question: *How do we find joy in the face of life's inevitable suffering?* Author Douglas Abrams pieces it all together with cutting edge scientific research. The final product is a gift for our times.

Naturally, this book is the subject of our Wednesday afternoon Lenten study. In addition, Sunday worship for the season of Lent will explore *what blocks our joy?* with reference to the temptations in the wilderness and the insights of this book.

When we recognize how our *joy* is blocked we can make choices and engage spiritual practices that free us to experience the *joy* that **God** intends for us. In the process our Christian life grows and deepens into *joy*.

## **Matthew 4: 1-4**

I learned a new term a few months ago. It's called FOMO. Has anyone else come across it? FOMO, FOMO. *Fear of Missing Out*. In a world with an App for everything, and the temptation to be totally plugged in, all the time, the younger generations are experiencing angst about missing out on anything. Smart watches, Fitbits, Smart phones, tablets, and pencil thin laptops all interconnected through the Cloud offer instant access to almost everything.

Officially FOMO is defined as *"a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent"*. This social angst is characterized by *"a desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing"*.

However, in a strange way, Fear of Missing Out causes people to focus on their devices more than on the relationships right in front of them. FOMO drives folk away from, and out of committed relationships, these days. You never know who you might meet just around the corner.

Fear of Missing Out pushes people to keep all their options open well past the best before date. FOMO ruins relationships and lives because one gets over attached to possible happenings instead of connecting to real people.

In my generation this sort of thing is called living out of the Scarcity Model: The fear of not getting enough or not getting our fair share. Or as this sign suggests, "Sorry the lifestyle you ordered is currently out of stock". Families have foundered over this version for decades if not centuries.

It's used in advertising every day: "Limited time offer. Hurry only a few spots left. Don't miss out." And we hurry. Costco has perfected this ploy, driving impulse buying to new heights.

Fear of Missing Out or fear of not getting our fair share drives *joy* out of our lives every time.

The first temptation that **Jesus** faces in the wilderness after forty days of fasting is about suddenly getting enough food. The impulsive imperative "*Turn these stones into bread. Don't miss out on another meal,*" rings in **Jesus'** ears.

The tempter invokes the Scarcity Model; the fear of not having enough or FOMO; the Fear of Missing Out. In short, it is the over attachment to external stimuli, or sensory perception which is always fleeting.

The problem with living out of Scarcity is; when we are caught in the fear of not enough, enough can never be enough.

The problem with FOMO is; there is always something new happening, arriving, improving, changing, that we just have to be part of and can't possibly be.

These obsessions block our *joy* every time. These fears lead to stress, anxiety, frustration and anger: Definitely not our happy place. Over attachment to external stimuli, or sense perception blocks the deep *joy* we all seek.

So, according to His Holiness the **Dali Lama** there are two different kinds, two levels if you like to *joy* or happiness. First there is the experience of pleasure through our senses, sex, food, music, sweets, art.

However, Scientists have found that the more we experience any pleasure the more we become numb to its effects and take its pleasures for

granted. The first bowl of ice cream is sublime, the second bowl is tasty and the third causes indigestion.

But we can also experience pleasure at a deeper level through the mind, such as through love, compassion and generosity.

We know the power in caring relationships which reinforces our core hopes, dreams and desires.

We know that deep sense of rightness when we go the extra mile to help out our family and friends, and even strangers.

The difference in the two kinds of *joy* is the sense of fulfilment one feels at this deeper level. While the pleasure of the senses is brief, the joy at this deeper level is much longer lasting. It is true *joy*.

A believer develops this deeper level of joy through faith in a good and loving **God**, which brings inner strength, inner peace. This kind of *joy* or happiness comes from within. Then the pleasures of the senses become less important. We can free ourselves from the obsessions or over attachments to superficial pleasures.

As **Jesus** answered the tempter “***We do not live by bread alone. But by every word God speaks.***”

Food is necessary, but we know love, compassion and generosity make it all the difference. Love, compassion and generosity free us from the grip of the superficial and focus us on the **joy** of abundant living.

Now some of you might be thinking this is all well and good but how do we live this? Here is a daily practice that helps us stay at the deeper level of *joy* and avoid the over- attachments that plague us.

### Morning Intention Setting:

1. Sit comfortably on a chair or lie in bed before getting up in the morning.
2. Close your eyes and take several long, deep breaths through your nose.
3. Ask yourself: ***“What is my heart’s desire?”***

***What do I wish for myself, for my loved ones, and for the world?”***

The Dalai Lama has a simple way of testing our intentions:

***“Is it just for me, or for others? For the benefit of the few, or for the many? For now, or for the future?”***

4. State your intention for the day. For example: ***“Today may I greet everyone with the love that is in my heart.”***

You might like to repeat the following four lines adapted from the traditional Tibetan prayer of the Four Immeasurables.

*May all beings attain happiness.*

*May all beings be free from suffering.*

*May all beings never be separated from joy.*

*May all beings abide in equanimity.*