

SERMON - THE JOY OF LIVING WORSHIPFULLY

Well, if you've been following our online series for the past 3 weeks, you'll know that we've been having conversations with people from our community about their pandemic Epiphanies. Some of their biggest realisations about themselves, life and faith. I don't think that there's any doubt that this whole pandemic journey has taken many of us into new territories of thinking and reflection for just about every aspect of our lives. Deeper realisations about what it is in life, that truly matters.

I wonder what some of your realisations have been?

Obviously you've all realised just how much you've missed coming to Church. Or maybe you've realised just how difficult it is to live with family members, when you're all cooped up in same building. Or maybe a determination to live out what Gray raised. Live carefully but not fearfully.

What I want to do this morning is to share what's really been my deepest realisation of this whole journey. Or I should say, my deepest REMINDER. And I have to say, the beautiful and inspiring series we did on our Hymns of Worship, ignited this deeper appreciation.

Because my biggest reminder, is the wisdom of Proverbs 17:22.

"A joyful heart is good medicine,
but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."
Proverbs 17:22
Joy is infectious.

"A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."

I've realised just how important it is to cultivate the spirit of Joy. AND how the spirit of joy is right at the very heart of what it means to live lives centred in worship. Living life worship-fully.

And could you get a better image that captures the spirit of joy than this. The extraordinary Bishop Desmond Tutu who recently passed away.

I read many of the tributes to Desmond Tutu and they all talked about his immense courage to speak out against the evil of apartheid, at tremendous risk to his own life.

They talked about his commitment to actually live out the profound truth of Christ's radical forgiveness, as witnessed in his Truth and Reconciliation work.

They talked about the way his whole life was saturated in prayer.

But what ALSO stood out over and over, was just how many people spoke about his enormous spirit of joy. And the important truth Tutu gives us about Christian joy... is that it isn't somehow separate from the pain and suffering of our lives... it's the joy we find within our times of pain and suffering. Which is why the wisdom from is so pertinent and powerful for our human condition.

I have had so many conversations with people over the past few months who in different ways have been struggling. And it's not very surprising because there's been a lot going in the world to steal our joy, crush our spirits and dry our bones.

So again, my biggest reminder. The truth of that worship quote that Hayley read from William Temple... just how important it is, to feed our hearts, minds and our imagination with the truth, beauty and goodness of God. Get a booster shot. A daily booster shot of those holy qualities that Paul urges us to cultivate. **Whatever is true, pure, noble excellent and praiseworthy**, feed and nourish your souls with these things said Paul. WHY? Because they are life giving, life affirming. They enrich us. They enhance us. They cultivate the spirit of Joy.

As always Eugene Peterson in the Message translation amplifies the beauty of this truth.

"Fill your minds and meditate on all things true, noble, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Do this, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies."

Fill your minds and meditate on all things true, noble, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Do this, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies. This is the Christian path, the Christ way, the Godly way in 47 words. And what I most love about Paul's wisdom, is that he points out the cause and the effect. Fill your lives with the truth, beauty and goodness of God, and God will form us into God's most excellent harmonies. This is why we're here. This is the heart of worship.

I was at a small gathering last week and Peter Bowden captured a really important truth about the spirit of Joy. He said "Joy is infectious". And I thought bang on Peter. It can change the state of things. But then another thought struck me. **There is another spiritual dimension to this.**

The things that can crush our spirit are also infectious. The spirit of anxiety, fear, judgment, criticism and despair. How important is it for our human spirit that we cultivate the good fruits of God in our lives? A daily booster shot of all that is true, pure, noble, excellent and praiseworthy. St Paul — Philippians 4:8

So too are the things that can crush our spirit. The spirit of anxiety and fear can be infectious. The spirit of judgment, criticism and despair can be infectious. All the things that can suck the life from us, diminish our humanity and crush our spirit are just as contagious.

Which makes that wisdom from St Paul, even more pertinent. To live a life centred in the spirit of worship – is to live a life cultivating the truth, the beauty and the goodness of God, in the everyday experiences of our lives.

So I want to spend a few minutes experiencing the beauty and goodness of God through some images I've put together. A visual celebration of some of the good gifts of life and the spirit of JOY. See what they evoke in you!



The joy of children among creatures



The joy of creatures



The joy of the elderly. I always find the faces of the elderly so interesting to see because all of their life experiences are etched into their faces.

Their joys and their sorrows.



The joy of the young and parenthood. I still remember being swung with my Mum and Dad when I was about 5 on the way to the circus in the snow. The sheer thrill of it.



The joy of the Jones with creatures. But take out the humans



You can't tell me that this isn't a dog celebrating the God-given gift of her little creature life. And guess what. Her joy is good medicine for me when my spirit is a little crushed. Because her joy is infectious. And it's God given and it's sacred.

And finally, a little video clip that Kim showed me yesterday. And it really affected me. This is a small baby who's been profoundly deaf from birth. But is now given an implant and is about to hear its mothers voice for the very first time. **VIDEO CLIP** **Click here to see.** https://youtu.be/_Q5kO4YXFs



This is tears of Joy stuff

What's the common thread running through all these clips?

- Well firstly they are infectious. Joy is contagious. I was watching everyone. All smiling.
- Secondly, they remind us that the good gifts of God, that feed and nourish our souls are all around us. The precious things of life that we can too often take for granted are there to be celebrated.

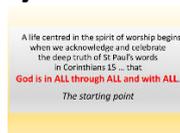
And for me, this what belonging to a worshipping community is all about. We come as gathered church community in Christ, with all of our foibles, with all our imperfections, and with all our brokenness, but we also come, with our courage, our compassion and our Spirit of hope... and we come, to be **a community of people who aspire to live lives centred in the spirit of worship.** In every aspect and endeavour of our lives. **Centred in the WAY of Christ**, so that the Spirit can form us into God's most excellent harmonies.



So what brings you joy for your spirit when you might feel a little crushed?

What's your good medicine? What might it look like to celebrate God's truth, beauty and goodness in the everyday experiences of life?

To begin to close, I want to give 2 fundamental frameworks of what it looks like, to live lives centred in the spirit of worship. 2 understandings to help us to nurture and cultivate the Joy of living worship-fully.



FIRSTLY, I believe that what scripture shows us over and over, is that a life centred in the spirit of worship begins, when we acknowledge and celebrate the truth of St Paul's words in Corinthians 15... that **God is in ALL through ALL and with ALL**. And I take the word, ALL to mean, ALL of Creation. The fabric and shape of ALL reality. This is the absolute starting point for a life centred in the Spirit of worship.

The more we understand
just how ALL-ENCOMPASSING God's presence
and love really is ...
the more we can experience
the joy of God's presence in our lives.
The more we cultivate a spirit of reverence
and deep gratitude for all that God created
and gifted to us... the more we cultivate
the joy of living worship-full lives.

Because doesn't it stand to reason, that the more we understand just how ALL-ENCOMPASSING God's presence and love really is ... the more we can experience the joy of God's presence in our lives. And the more we cultivate a spirit of reverence and deep gratitude for all that God created and gifted to us... the more we can cultivate the joy of living worship-full lives.

And we should never under-estimate how the worship heart, exists in the everyday and the so called ordinary. It's what the likes of Desmond Tutu and Brother Roger intuitively grasped. Practising the presence of God in the everyday reality of our lives.

GOD'S JOY
is the joy of God's presence in our lives.
The more we cultivate a spirit of reverence
and deep gratitude for all that God created
and gifted to us... the more we cultivate
the joy of living worship-full lives.

And the second understanding and framework flows out from this. A life centred in the spirit of worship, is when we acknowledge and celebrate that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. That My Story-and Your story, are all part of OUR Story which is part of THE STORY. God's saving, healing purposes at work in the world, through the Way of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is the fundamental source of our Christian joy.

• And what this means,
is that means that we are in a
Holy COMMUNION with God;
A Holy Communion with each other
and with all of humanity;
and with the whole of God's good creation,
the environment
and all creatures great and small.

Because what this all means, is we are in a Holy COMMUNION with God (as in Father, Son and Holy Spirit). A Holy communion with each other, with all of humanity and the whole of God's good creation, all creatures great and small. **And Christ is at the centre of it all. This for me, is the profound truth of these words from Jesus in today's Gospel**

"Make yourselves at home in my love.
If you keep my commands,
you'll remain intimately at home in my love.
As I have made my home in my father's love.
And I tell you these things for a purpose:
that my joy might be your joy,
and your joy may be complete."
John 15:9-10

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This is what we will celebrate when we come to share together, our first Holy Communion in over 5 months.

I'll finish with this beautiful poem...

I sometimes forget that I was created for joy
 My heart is too busy
 My heart is too heavy
 For me to remember
 that I have been called to dance
 the Sacred dance of life

**I sometimes forget that I was created for Joy.
 My mind is too busy.
 My Heart is too heavy, for me to remember
 that I have been called to dance
 the Sacred dance of life.**

**I was created to smile
 To Love
 To be lifted up
 And to lift others up.
 O' Sacred One,
 Untangle my feet from all that ensnares.
 Free my soul.
 That we might Dance,
 and that our dancing might be contagious.**

**“To worship is to quicken the conscience
 by the holiness of God,
 to feed our minds with the truth of God,
 to purge and cleanse our imaginations
 with the beauty of God,
 to open our hearts to the love of God,
 to devote our wills to the purposes of God”**

William Temple

