

November 30 & December 1, 2024

Do Not Be Afraid | Practice Joy

John 17:13

Pastor Paul Dean

Where is your Joy? It was a question my friend asked of his mom a couple of years ago. His mom had retired years prior from a pretty high-powered consulting job, and after a couple years of doing some side gigs she was finally done, retired. The phone calls, the invitations to engage in some capacity in her former career finally either stopped or she had decided to be done. But what that gave her was time... and she filled that time with preparing to die. She had several bouts with cancer, and so death was not a stranger.

However, it consumed her to the point that she kind of shut out the world and the time she could be spending with my family – traveling, engaging in relationships, was spent planning for life without her. It was depressing and it was hurting her and my friend's family at a time of their lives when they finally had the time and the resources to do some fun things. And so, my friend simply asked the question that needed to be asked. Mom, where is your Joy?

In the gospel of John, Jesus is preparing to leave, preparing for his own death. He was gathered with his disciples, and he prays. He prays almost a desperate prayer. A prayer that asks that the disciples would come to know God just as he knows God. He prays that the disciples and God would become one so that they would come to know that same kind of joy that Jesus knows. The joy of oneness with God.

¹³ But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. John 17:13

Jesus' prayer, his petition, recognize one simple truth. That is presence, his physical presence allowed his disciples to experience joy. However, when he was gone, his absence would create a void, a space where all kinds of other things would enter. And Jesus' prayer for those disciples was for

that space to be filled with joy, not only his disciples for all of those who would come to believe... you and me, here now in our time.

Jesus knew what the greatest stealer of joy was. It was the same thing that was stealing my friends moms joy. Fear... fear is the great thief of Joy. Jesus knew that in his absence the disciples were going to experience massive fear. The weight of the world was going to descend upon them and attempt to steal their joy. Fear... the great joy thief.

But Jesus prayer, is that we would know our God just as he knows God. That we would know our creator as intimately as a son knows his father restores our joy. So... what does Jesus know about God? What does this son know about his father? Well Jesus knew that God so loved the world that God was willing to come to us as one of us. Jesus knew that God so loved the world that God was willing to give it all for us. Jesus knew that God so loved the world in the battle with evil, God is on our side.

That the joy of Jesus would be complete in us, through the oneness with God is what Jesus prays for. And I'm not talking about happiness. Happiness and joy are not the same. Happiness is an emotional response to all kinds of things –

Joy is a deeper reality – a reality that comes from knowing, with all confidence, like Jesus knew, that no matter what – even as he faced death itself – that he was loved. He was not abandoned. He was not forsaken. He was not alone. Even when we wasn't happy, especially when he was not happy – his relationship with his creator brought him joy.

So, what do you fear? What is stealing the joy that God desires for us all? Do you fear death – it's a big one which has been stealing joy for a lot of us for a very long time. What do you fear and how is it stealing your joy? Is it the fear of not having enough, time, money, relationships? Over this season of advent have a serious conversation with yourself. Be bold with yourself. Ask yourself the question "Where's my joy?"

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And if you find that fear is winning the day lean into joy, and here is how. While fear is the joy thief... Gratitude is the fear antidote. Several years ago when I was with my wife's grandmother on her death bed... she wasn't happy about dying but she was filled with joy because she had absolute confidence in who she was in the eyes of God. But that's was how she lived much of her life, and she had a tough, tough life. She had lots of things happen in her life that could bring about lots of fear. But you could see her joy because she knew that gratitude was the antidote for fear. She didn't have much, but what she had she was immensely grateful for. Her family, her grandkids, her great-grand kids. Gratitude...

She was filled with so much gratitude that it sometimes became annoying. But it warded off fear and her joy shined through. So... for you, for me, this advent let us start with joy through gratitude. So here is a small discipline for you to practice. First, fear is very real. Jesus calls it the evil one. Satan is fear and Satan is a liar. But to deny the presence of evil can be really debilitating. So... when fear creeps in, recognize it. Welcome it... acknowledge it.

Actually say... welcome fear I know you are here. By recognizing it you can call the shots... you have more control... Then start listing off things that you are grateful for. In your mind tell fear look at that list of things you are grateful for and while fear doesn't magically go away your joy comes back. It's a discipline, a practice.

Each and every time you experience fear I want to encourage you to immediately counter with thoughts of gratitude. Do you fear for your kids? Counter that fear with listing off how grateful you are for them. Do you fear for your financial situation? Counter that fear with thoughts of gratitude for what you do have. Do you fear for your health? Counter that fear with grateful thoughts that today you are here. Because the plea that Jesus makes for his disciples is the same plea that he makes for us today...