

John 8:1-11

¹ Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, ² but early the next morning He was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and He sat down and taught them. ³ As He was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

⁴ “Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ The law of Moses says to stone her. What do You say?”

⁶ They were trying to trap Him into saying something they could use against Him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with His finger. ⁷ They kept demanding an answer, so He stood up again and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” ⁸ Then He stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

⁹ When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. ¹⁰ Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”

¹¹ “No, Lord,” she said.

And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”

“A Fruitful Life of Joy”

September 2, 2018

Do you know someone who acts like the whole world stinks?

Once, a cranky grandpa laid down to take a nap. To have a little fun, his grandson rubbed some Limburger cheese on his mustache, right under his nose.

Grandpa woke up with a snort, staggered off the couch and shouted, “This room stinks!”

On through the house he went, shouting, “This whole house stinks!” He charged out on the porch ...and shouted as loud as he could, “The whole world stinks!”

The truth is, it was grandpa who stunk. The problem was right under his own nose.

Most of the time when we feel helpless and hopeless the problem isn’t with the world, but it’s with us – or *in* us! It may be that I have a negative attitude.

Today we read about a woman caught in the shame of adultery. This was a lady with a near-death experience. She anticipated the death penalty, and there were plenty of willing executioners.

But Jesus diffuses the anger and sets the woman free. Free from fear, she finds her life transformed!

Still, how does a woman continue to live in the community bearing a reputation scorned by her neighbors?

She’s able, because the Lord has declared her freedom! She will cling to the promise of Jesus, who said: “Neither do I condemn you!”

With the absence of condemnation there is the hope of a new beginning!

You know, I think we can endure a lot of frustration, we can tolerate a lot of pain in the world when we hear the voice of the Holy One whispering, “Neither do I condemn you!” What joy this brought the woman, and what joy it can bring to you!

Today we’re focusing on *Joy!* When we come to God through Jesus Christ, God begins to shape our spirit with His Spirit. The fruit of His Spirit is Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Humility, and Self-Control! We receive not just one of these or some of these, but all of this! The benefit and blessing of the Spirit’s indwelling is the “fruit of the Spirit,”

not the “fruits of the Spirit.” Joy is the mark of a disciple, and the joy that God gives is different from the joy or happiness of the world.

We find that in the Bible, the people who knew God, who knew the love and kindness of God, were people who experienced joy! Even if the circumstances of their life was traumatic, those who believed and trust God, those who believed that God loved them ...experienced a joy unknown to others in the world.

We’re going to look at a passage from the prophet Isaiah who speaks to the nation of Israel at a time when the glory and promise of the nation was long past. There was no longer any reason to rejoice. Yet Isaiah offers a promise from God; and because of that promise, their joy is stirred!

READING Isaiah 61:1-7

¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me,
for the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted
and to proclaim that captives will be released
and prisoners will be freed.

² He has sent me to tell those who mourn
that the time of the LORD’s favor has come,
and with it, the day of God’s anger against their ene-
mies.

³ To all who mourn in Israel,
He will give a crown of beauty for ashes,
a joyous blessing instead of mourning,
festive praise instead of despair.
In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks
that the LORD has planted for His own glory.

⁴ They will rebuild the ancient ruins,
repairing cities destroyed long ago.
They will revive them,
though they have been deserted for many generations.

⁵ Foreigners will be your servants.
They will feed your flocks and plow your fields
and tend your vineyards.

⁶ You will be called priests of the LORD,
ministers of our God.
You will feed on the treasures of the nations
and boast in their riches.

⁷ Instead of shame and dishonor,
you will enjoy a double share of honor.
You will possess a double portion of prosperity in your land,
and everlasting joy will be yours.

You heard how Isaiah began: He’s bringing good news to the poor, to the brokenhearted, to

the prisoners! Isaiah is telling his people: The ancient ruins will be rebuilt; the cities will be repaired! The season of exile and despair will come to an end and God will grant Israel a role and a purpose that will lead to – everlasting joy!

Did you know that these are the words from which Jesus read as He started out in ministry! “The Lord has anointed Me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn...”

Have we not been afflicted and brokenhearted? Are we not among those who were prisoners to grief or chained to fear, anger, or despair?

But joy is tied to Jesus Christ and His victory! Jesus broke the power over all forces when He defeated death – the ultimate enemy! And when the One who stands as conqueror over *all* principalities and powers offers His hand to heal our scarred and broken souls, the potential for joy is exceptional!

There’s a quiet, confident joy knowing we have One who has been through the worst catastrophes before us, and He is able to come and take us by the hand to lead us from one world to the next, to resurrect life, hope, and joy!

Now let’s not be confused about what joy is! Joy is different from happiness. We get “happy” over some current event, like Christmas morning when your favorite relatives are present, and everyone likes their gifts and the baby cooperates with your prearranged schedule. Happiness comes with that perfect wedding day when the sun shines, the flower girls behave, and the groom remembers what really matters when the bride appears at the end of the aisle.

“Happiness” is a good feeling based on good circumstances. Happiness is something to enjoy – when it happens! But there are so many other moments when life doesn’t happen according to our desires!

What then? What can we expect to experience when life turns upside down, when we get nothing we want and everything we don’t want?

“Joy” goes deeper than the circumstances of life around us. In the New Testament joy is confidence in God’s grace, despite circumstances – despite what *happens* joy is the ability to hold up because we know we are being held up! Joy is the confidence that God is in control of every detail of life even when those details appear to be out of control.

Jesus demonstrated that same joy, that confident joy sustaining Him when He came to the hour of the cross. Through the beatings He experienced, He was looking past the cross because He believed in the love of His Father: “...it was for the joy that was set before Him that [He] endured the cross, despising its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God!” (Hebrews 12:2)

Jesus endured all that He endured, not for the *fun* of it. It wasn’t fun! But for the joy that was set before Him; the joy of God’s promise ...knowing and believing that the Father was present with Him. And when God is present, we can endure most anything!

We might confuse joy with laughter, or fun, or happiness. But joy is much deeper than the current events surrounding us, and joy comes through *faith* in Jesus, enabling us to look past all our trials – because *His* victory is *ours*! His glory brings us into glory!

We receive that same Spirit! Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in Me, and I in them bear much fruit because apart from Me you can do nothing... I have said

these things to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete!” (John 15:5, 11)

Do you know the Lord’s joy?

Theologian Paul Tillich asks, “Is our lack of joy due to the fact that we are Christians, or to the fact that we are not Christian enough?”

By my own efforts, from out of my old nature, I’ll grow fruit of the flesh. And it might look nice, but it won’t look like Jesus. With my best efforts I can’t grow godliness, because the “fruit of the Spirit” comes only from godly seeds. We can’t make ourselves look like God. Only God can do that. Only God can produce His nature in me.

Having said that, we do have a role to play. Our job in spiritual growth is to cooperate with the Gardener! So let’s see what cooperation looks like in our lives.¹

1) First, we have to be *receptive*. A seed can’t get into hard, clay-packed soil. Our job includes a softer, receptive heart and mind so that we can receive the seeds God wants to plant in our lives.

Admittedly, being receptive can be a challenge at times. We can stubbornly shield ourselves from change. What if we’re not in the mood for God to grow in us? What if we’d rather slump down on the couch in front of TV? What if we *like* the dullness of our days because there’s a kind of predictable safety there?

When we recognize this kind of resistance, we’re wise to tell a friend, say a prayer, or just gently remind ourselves that God’s not out to “get us” with His fruit. He simply wants us to grow the way we want ourselves to grow: into people who make a difference and live lives that matter!

Being receptive calls for humility.

2) Secondly, *we endure pruning*. Part of the growing process involves cutting off what is diseased or no longer necessary or even what is taking nutrients that are needed elsewhere.

Pruning can be painful because we don’t want to part with some stuff that may actually need to go. Because it’s dated or the wrong kind of thinking – like sarcasm, grudges, or foolish kidding – there are times we need to “Let it go!” for now.

3) The third way we cooperate is *we stay connected*. We can’t grow spiritually if we detach ourselves from the source of our life and strength and vitality! A leaf doesn’t continue growing once it’s pulled from the branch. When we stop hanging out with others who care about growing we’ll probably stop growing, too. When we let week after week slip by without going to worship or to our small study group, or we just stop bringing what’s on our hearts and minds to God through prayer, we’ll shrink rather than grow.

Are you ready to get growing?

It’s up to God to grow His fruit in our lives, but it’s up to us to cooperate with Him.

We sang some songs of joy today, but let me share one more with you. It won’t really sound like a “joy” song, but it is:

**Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home;
Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home.
I looked over Jordan and what did I see,**

¹ Sermon resource: “*Naked Fruit*”; by Elisa Morgan Revell Books, 2004

**Coming for to carry me home?
A band of angels coming after me,
Coming for to carry me home.**

These songs come from out of a period when Africans were forced into slavery and labor in these Americas. The words reveal a bitter pain from toil and hardships that were too heavy a burden to bear. But from under that burden they believed there was for them a bright hope, that they belonged to another world! They believed that their Jesus would one day bring a rest for them no one could disturb; a rest and joy that could only be gotten in the land of glory beyond the river! We're talking about heaven, now!

Christian joy is an outlook that sees beyond the immediate to the eventual as we look toward what will eventually be our victory in glory!

The "fruit" of joy comes from the confidence we have in God's loving care! We are confident in God's grace and justice and mercy – despite the circumstances that may be gloomy now. I want you to hear that word, "confident!" and remember that's how *faith* is defined! **Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.** (Hebrews 11:1)

We're believing that God will sustain us as He impresses on our lives – at a moment in time – a phrase from a hymn or song, a verse in the Bible, a thought that just occurred in your time of trouble: God is with you through the storms!

And He is!

The trials of life are not the results of who God is but the results of this fallen world that is broken and degraded with sin and evil and temptations of every kind!

Billy Sunday once said, "If you have no joy in your religion, there's a leak in your Christianity somewhere."

What would joy look like in your life?

You can have confidence in salvation; you can know that you know that you know you are going to heaven through the witness of the Holy Spirit in your life! Did you know that?

Do you need this joy that only God can offer? You can receive the fruit of His Spirit if you come to Jesus and live your life as though He is the most important vitamin, protein, and nourishment; He is the blood, breath, and the best blast of fresh air you'll ever need! But you'll need to bow before Him in surrender, believing that faith in Jesus Christ is the way, God's way, to His eternal reward.

We need Him; we need Jesus today. Jesus tomorrow. Jesus always!

Are you connected to Him?

You can close the connection to Him coming to Communion, kneeling to confess that you're a sinner, asking God to forgive you of your sins and invite Jesus into your life today! It is through this special sacrament that we are joined to the covenant God! Let's stay connected!