

***I Choose Joy* Rev Brigid Beckman Meditation- Message 8-7-22**

For our time of meditation today, I'm going to point us toward a book that many of us here have read: *The Book of Joy*, by Douglas Abrams, based on 5 days spent interviewing the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

In the Joy Practices section of the book, is the practice of setting an intention-- as shared by the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu. They remind us that "Every conscious action begins with intention...which is simply a way to prepare our minds and hearts for how we want to face the day..." As we set our individual intentions, we can lean into our communal intention to live into the words of who we say we are in our vision and mission, and our shared core values.

So for now, wherever you are, whether here in the sanctuary, watching the live stream or the recording, please allow yourself to:

1. Sit comfortably, sense the soles of your feet on the ground... You can rest your hands on your legs or on your belly.
2. Close your eyes [or soften your gaze] and take several long breaths through your nose... Feel your stomach [or chest] rise and fall as you breathe... PAUSE
3. Now ask yourself: "What is my heart's desire? What do I wish for myself, for my loved ones, and for the world?" Our deepest desires usually lie beyond our temporary wishes and wants. They are likely to involve living with profound human values that lead to our greatest happiness, calling us back to our place within the fabric of life.
4. Now state your intention silently to yourself. It can be specific or it can be general. If [nothing arises], you can repeat these... lines adapted from the traditional Tibetan prayer of the Four Immeasurables, which has guided many on their journey to more compassion and greater happiness:

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

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May all beings never be separated from joy...

As we come back fully into the room, gently hold your intention in your heart-mind and take a moment now to bring to mind how you might answer these questions: What IS Joy? And what does it mean to *you* to *choose* joy?

When the walls come tumbling down... I choose JOY!

In my talk last week I focused on the art of letting go, on how our circumstances call us to surrender our need to control outcomes, on the gift of reaching out for help, on the benefit of taking a long-view, a God view...

On Tuesday, talking to Roger about what I wanted to tweak for this week's theme, I listed the litany of what was up for me: the ongoing reality of my house turned upside down after last week's flood; Billy, my son who is getting married on Saturday got covid, and my parents, sister and I had a separate covid exposure... I have to admit, I sort of laughed-- so I wouldn't cry and put my head on the table! And that was before I knew Dad and Gen also caught the covid scourge. (Mom and I had negative PCR tests, and I had a negative rapid test this morning!)

When the walls come tumbling down... I choose JOY! As always, Roger found the perfect song! :-)

One of the lasting gifts of my first year at One Spirit is the sense that “the Truth is the Truth is the Truth.” In that context, it’s a reminder that underneath the various expressions of religious practices and beliefs is the profound Truth that we carry the seeds of the whole universe in us, that we are sparks of something eternal and ineffable.

In another context, I love when I find the same concept shared across time, place and tradition-- like I choose joy.

- Nia! I choose JOY foundation to the movement practice- finding joy in the way the body is designed to move-- no matter what “limits” I may have, I can still find healing and joy in my body, mind and spirit when I choose JOY
- Henri Nouwen: “Joy is not the same as happiness. We can be unhappy about many things, but joy can still be there because it comes from the knowledge of God’s love for us...Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day. It is a choice based on the knowledge that we belong to God and have found in God our refuge and our safety and that nothing, not even death, can take God away from us.
- Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu: going back to this book this week was like having a conversation with dear, trusted friends! Here is what these two wise, humble, joy-filled teachers reminded me.

The Archbishop and the Dalai Lama name and describe, with great compassion for their own humanity AND OURS, eight ways we shut ourselves off from accessing that deeper, lasting joy that is the foundation of every circumstance, if we choose to allow it. The obstacles to joy are:

- Fear, Stress and Anxiety
- Frustration and Anger
- Sadness and Grief
- Despair
- Loneliness

- Envy
- Suffering and Adversity
- Illness and Fear of Death

At different times in our life-- or even different days in our week-- or moments in a day!-- we each face these obstacles to some degree. I may not envy my neighbor's car or house (well...maybe I envy their plumbing!), but what if I envy someone else's talents? "*I wish I could do such and such as well as so and so!*"

At times, we may feel completely overwhelmed by the magnitude of our worries about the bigger world-- and there is plenty to worry about-- and our close to home concerns. You may have felt the crushing weight of grief. We may intellectually understand that death is part of life, but then a moment comes that forces us to go beyond an abstract understanding or fear to a sudden and unavoidable reckoning with our mortality, or that of someone we cherish.

But of course the obstacles are not the final word! The beauty of their teaching are the Eight Pillars of Joy, gifts that are as present as our obstacles, and in fact are sometimes the paradoxical flip side of the coin. Here is found the reminder that our way to joy is not through *denying or eliminating* the very real, poignant, frustrating obstacles we face. The way to joy asks us to take a "God-view," to step back from our own pain, and find the larger view that gives us space to heal. Once again, my own reminder this week was to step into that bigger perspective.

The way to lasting joy begins then, says the Dalai Lama, with "a shift in perspective—from oneself and toward others, from anguish to compassion— seeing that others are suffering as well...we recognize... we are not alone, our pain is lessened. This recognition that we are all connected...is the birth of empathy and compassion." And Archbishop Tutu reminds us *when we fail at shifting our perspective, then we are called to treat ourselves with compassion too.*

For me this week, it was that pillar of acceptance that helped me get a grip. "Why be unhappy about something if it can be remedied? And what is the use of being unhappy if

it cannot be remedied?...Acceptance...is the opposite of resignation and defeat.” It is accepting reality all while engaging fully with those things in our own world, and in the larger world that call to us for change. “Acceptance-- whether we believe in God or not-- allows us to move into the fullness of joy.... To see clearly , and to respond appropriately” to all we face.

Perspective. Humility. Humor. The *acceptance* of “that which is” that is the place where change begins.

We fill ourselves at the well of these “qualities of the mind” and the “qualities of the heart” of *forgiveness* that frees us from the past. Gratitude. Compassion. Generosity. And once again we come to the *practices* that help us fill our wells, that help us find enough spaciousness to witness our habits, our ways of getting stuck, our painful circumstances, even our joys...

Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, Henri Nouwen, Jesus of Nazareth, the practices of Nia, of yoga... there are so many “way showers” pointing us toward choosing joy... yet it is up to each of us to make the choice. Last Monday night, after a week of sleeping in the adorable but COZY guest room at mom and dad’s, we learned that my sister’s friend who’d visited that afternoon had tested positive for covid. It was the proverbial straw, and I just lost it! I simply could not stop the tears of fear, of frustration, of misplaced anger, of grief at missing my home, my own bed, my routines!

They were cleansing tears like the much needed rain we’ve had these past few days, but then I took a deep breath. Had a good talk with my mom and sister. Gained a deeper perspective. Forgiveness that pushed me to move beyond my petty resentment of a dear soul who unwittingly carried covid into our visit. Found I could once again lean into gratitude. To grace. To Joy in knowing I am one with the Great Mystery. Choosing Joy didn’t change the situation. It simply changed my response to it. And that makes all the difference.

So I invite you to consider this week-- what helps you to *choose* joy? Can you see your obstacles to joy in a new light, or with a longer God-view perspective? Are there people

in your life, spiritual practices, sacred spaces that give you the spaciousness to say “I surrender to Joy? No matter what.” And I’ll leave us with the wisdom of Hafiz:

Created For Joy ~Hafiz

*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.*

May we find strength in each other so we may choose JOY. And may our JOY be contagious. And so it is. Amen!