

December 15, 2019
Rev. Jane Florence
Title "The Rhythm of Joy"
Text: Luke 1:46-55, John 15: 9-11



Back in the 60's, the Peanut cartoon of Charles Schultz spoke the words, "Happiness is ... a warm puppy." Someone picked up the theme, and it became a culture slogan. "Happiness is..." would end in different sayings each week, poster or bumpersticker

When we get right down to it, happiness seems rather elusive. Happiness is a warm puppy – which turns into unhappiness when he chews the heel of your favorite shoes. Happiness is a sunny day in the park -which turns into unhappiness when it rains on your picnic. Happiness is a marriage engagement-which turns into unhappiness when the toilet seat is left up or the toothpaste top goes missing. Happiness is a parking place near the door when it's cold outside-which turns into unhappiness when you come out to find the car is dented or the tire is flat.

Tires do go flat, puppies do chew shoes, rain falls, and people we love can irritate us. So, how do we maintain happiness when things that make us happy keep changing into things that don't? Some people go searching for happiness. They spend life on a quest of an uncertain destination in the Land of Happiness. Some people try to control all the variables – the puppy, the weather- the relationship- the car. They try to control everything that might bring them unhappiness. They spend life in anxious obsession attempting to control the cosmos in order to be happy. It doesn't work that way .

There is a difference between Joy and Happiness. Happiness depends on the situation: the puppies' behavior, the spouse or children's attitude, or every other variable of our world. Joy transcends the circumstances of life. Real joy is a deep and lasting quality that enables us to transcend all times.

Joy is a cause, not a result. Joy is a spiritual principle, an aura of our soul, an essence of our being. Joy is the deep abiding serenity, contentment, thanksgiving we know when we find our true center in God and find God at our true center.

Mary sings her song, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God."

Mary, as legend has it, is an unwed teenager who could be stoned to death for her condition. The birth announcement from angel Gabriel doesn't sound like cause for happiness. Her betrothed, Joseph, could end their relationship, name her an adulteress, and stone her himself according to the law. If Joseph chose only to end the relationship, then her father could toss her out on the street to live as beggar or prostitute- if he or her brothers don't decide to kill her themselves for bringing shame to the family. There are lots of reasons for Mary to be singing a lament of woe instead of magnifying joy.

According to John, Jesus said, “As God has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. . . . dwell in God’s love. I have said these things to you so that **my joy** may be in you, and that **your joy** may be complete.”

Mary lived Jesus’ words before he ever grew big enough to say them. She received her motherhood news, traveled to see her aunt Elizabeth, whose child leaped with JOY, then Mary sang Hannah’s song of joy envisioning the upside down turning of God’s kingdom about to become real. Clearly, the authors of the gospels believed that this young woman, Mary, dwelled in God’s love, such that God’s love dwelled in her and took life through her. Not even the threats of death could steal Mary’s joy at the thought of the lowly being lifted up, the hungry being fed, and God’s mercy coming to life in her.

Last week, the drums taught a lesson of community connection- shared heartbeats. Another lesson my drums have taught me is the joy that can come through healing vibrations. The primordial beat was the first sound we all heard in our mother’s womb. Our mother’s heartbeat is our very first experience in life and research shows vibration has tremendous healing capabilities. Drumming has been used to address the pains beneath situational happiness to offer healing at a deeper level.

It is known that objects will match the beat of a vibration that is near. This law of entrainment has shown itself in science labs and in healing that has taken place through drumming music therapy for people afflicted by Parkinsons, stroke, Alzheimers, stress, paralysis, depression, so many dis-eases have shown patients finding joy and healing in music therapy.

His daughter and her husband visited the old man often. Mostly, the old man spent his days pacing around his room, unable to sit still or focus. His grown children would talk at him, but he made no response to them. They left each visit of the Alzheimer unit wondering if he had even known they were there, were their trips even worth it? Christine Stevens, a music therapist, entered his room one day even though staff had warned her it would do no good. She took two small paddle drums with her. When he stopped pacing even for a second, she tapped her drum. He stopped moving for a moment. She sat in a chair. He paced. She tapped. Like coaxing a wandering creature to safety, finally he sat. Then she placed a drum in his hand and she tapped it. She repeated- tapping her drum - then reaching across to tap the drum he held. Each week she returned to his room repeating the process. One day, she entered his room and sat down; he stopped pacing and sat beside her. She tapped her drum. placed one in his hands and tapped on his drum for him in response. The pattern continued. Over the course of a month, he began to sit longer and pace the room less. When Christine tapped her drum one day then reached across and tapped his drum, he reached across and tapped her drum. They began call and response pattern. The next time she visited him, his family was there watching him pace again. When Christine entered the room, he went to the chair and sat down. The family was surprised. Christine asked if they would like to join, and she handed everyone a drum. The old man hit his then reached over and hit the one in his daughter’s hand- as though to show her what to

do. He started the beats; he changed the rhythms, and finally, he began to hum along. Words were not exchanged, but communication was happening for the first time in a long time. Connection to other people had been missing from his life was now finding expression through the tapping drum. The drumming sessions continued. Family members would drum - he knew they were there - they knew he knew. One day, as Christine sat drumming with the old man and his family, the man started singing clearly, "My Bonnie lies over the ocean." Tears spilled down the daughter's face. She later explained to the therapist, Bonnie was her sister's name - her father had named her after that song. Her father found words that Alzheimers had stolen from him years ago. The family found joy again, and relationship connection deep within.¹

The church season of Advent is a season full of scripture readings that sing of joy. Mary sings her Magnificat; Zachariah sings God's praises; Simeon sings along with a host of heavenly angels proclaiming 'good news of great joy.' We can also hear stories of genocide, refugee exile and great sorrow. What will your soul hear in the final days of this season?

A little boy clambered up the hillside on an adventure with his mother. At the top they could see across the vast valley below. The boy yelled across a canyon, "who is there?" The canyon answered, "who is there?" The child could not see who spoke those words and he yelled again, "who are you?" Back came the words, "who are you?" The boy thought another hiker was teasing him from down the canyon, so he shouted, "please stop it!" The message came back, "please stop it." The child was becoming bewildered and frustrated. His mother stepped up to explain that no one was teasing him. He was hearing an echo of his own voice coming back to him. The child thought about it for a moment, then he cried out, "I love you!" The earth cried back, "I love you!" The child enthusiastically shouted, "You are so good!" The earth affirmed his goodness.²

What we put into the world comes back to us. When we live in joy, joy will live in us. This Advent sing praises and invite the divine energy to take up permanent residence in relationship with Christ and the evidence of God's Spirit will be seated deep within. Then that unrestrained joy will become the cadence of all our days, so that even the messiness and meanness of life, we can sound the beat of joy because it is the beat of God's grace ever pulsing in our lives waiting to be heard. Thanks be to God.

¹ Friedman, Robert Lawrence. *The Healing Power of the Drum*. 2000.

² Sir John Templeton, *Wisdom from World Religions*.