

Aging Gracefully during the Pandemic

Session 6: Joy

Opening Prayer

Pray the following words aloud together:

“Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.”
(Ps. 32:11)

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!
Let your gentleness be known to everyone.
The Lord is near.
Do not worry about anything,
but in everything by prayer and supplication

with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds
in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:4-7)

Amen.

The Embrace of Joy

Read the talking points throughout this process aloud. Simply have each participant read one paragraph at a time to the whole group, continuing around the circle.

- Joy is hard to define, but when you experience it, you recognize it. You hold your new infant grandchild and joy explodes within you. You get a call from an old friend and you are delighted. You sit around the holiday table with family or friends and joy fills your heart. Helen Keller described joy as a “holy fire that keeps our purpose warm and our intelligence aglow.”
- Joy lights us up and brings new life. Mother Teresa said: “Joy is prayer. Joy is strength. Joy is love. Joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls.” Archbishop Tutu claims, “Joy is much bigger than happiness. While happiness is often seen as being dependent on external circumstances, joy is not.”
- Several years ago we visited one of Mother Teresa’s homes for the dying in India and learned what she meant by joy. Once we entered a room with the sisters and dying patients, in the midst of suffering and death, and noticed a peaceful calm.
- The sisters tended each patient with great care and compassion.
- Joy is meant to be shared and it can be contagious! It offers us a sense of “enoughness,” and wholeness. Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit, along with love, peace, and other spiritual gifts. Even in the midst of suffering, a joyful person can still experience a sense of well-being and peace.
- Psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky identified three factors that seem to have the greatest influence on increasing happiness: “our ability to re-frame our present circumstances more positively, our ability to experience gratitude, and our choice to be kind and generous.”
- In 2012, the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu met for five days to discuss the topic of joy. The Book of Joy, which reports that conversation, draws the same conclusion that “our greatest joy

is when we seek to do good for others.” Over their lifetimes, these two remarkable men noticed “As we discover more joy, we can face suffering in

a way that ennobles rather than embitters. We have hardship without becoming hard. We have heartbreak without being broken.”

Reflection Questions

- ① How do think the sisters in the houses of the dying can remain so joyful in the midst of so much suffering?
- ② Do you agree with the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu that “Our greatest joy is when we seek to do good for others”?

- ③ What gives you joy in life?

Living in Joy

- **Joy can be creative.** Joy can accompany doing a good work or getting things done well. Joy can be derived from drawing or painting or singing. Projects such as sewing, knitting, gardening, wood-working, and pottery can all be sources of joy.
- A friend of mine worked all her life for the poor and marginalized. She spent her final days writing creative thank you notes to those who donated to her mission in Appalachia. Her work brought joy to herself and others!
- **Joy in humor.** Humor is related to joy, and laughter can be therapeutic. One comedian calls laughter “inner jogging” and a way for seniors to get exercise. Despite all the grim news in the midst of this crisis, “pandemic humor” is circulating, offering some comic relief in this stressful time. When we share it, we enhance our connection with one another. Humor can be a saving grace.
- Reading the Scriptures can be a source of joy also. In the gospels, Jesus tells his disciples: “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you” (Mt. 7:7). The night before he died, Jesus told his friends, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (Jn. 15:11). It could not be any clearer that Jesus wants us to be fulfilled and joyful. He wants us to walk with him, talk with him, be with him, and share joy with him.
- At the annunciation, Mary was filled with joy. In the stories of Jesus’ birth, there is a delightful spirit of joy. The magi were overwhelmed with joy when the star settled over the manger. Angels announced joy to the shepherds. In our Christmas carols we sing, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King.”
- During his ministry, Jesus told the disciples to rejoice and be glad when they are persecuted because their reward will be great in heaven. In so many instances, Jesus reached out his hand to extend the joy of healing to people who were bowed down with suffering and pain.
- At the tomb of Jesus, the women experienced great joy. Later, the disciples rejoiced when they witnessed the resurrected Jesus for themselves. “Were not our hearts burning within us?” said the two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:32).
- Joy is one of Pope Francis’ favorite topics. “Joy is the air Christians breathe,” he once said. “There is no Christian without joy,” he emphasized on another occasion. “The Christian identity card is joy, the Gospel’s joy... the joy of that hope that Jesus is waiting for us, the joy that—even with

the crosses and sufferings we bear in this life—is expressed in another way, which is peace in the certainty that Jesus accompanies us, is with us.”

- Joy lives within the soul, not on the surface level. Some lucky ones are in touch with some inner joy that is beyond ordinary life experience.
- **Room for celebration.** Even in the midst of the pandemic, the human heart can find reason for joyful celebration. Birthdays and graduations are commemorated with “drive-by” celebrations. Families dance together in their living rooms and people sing from their balconies. In New York, an

opera star celebrated his recovery from the virus from his balcony for an audience in the street. Heroic doctors and nurses paused from their work to give a shout-out to a patient who survived the virus. A teenage pilot was cheered for delivering medical supplies to a rural area. Even in times of pain and sorrow, we can find reason to rejoice.

- Let us close with the words of Jesuit Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: “Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God.” Let us notice more occasions for highlighting joy.

Reflection Questions

① What creative endeavors give you joy?

② Share something humorous that brought comic relief to you during this pandemic.

③ Are you reading the Scriptures? Do any of the passages offer you special encouragement or joy?

Closing Prayer

Pray the following words aloud together:

Jesus, during your ministry on Earth,
you showed your power and caring
by healing people of all ages and places in life,
bringing them and their family and friends joy.

Be present now to people
who need your loving touch
because of COVID-19.

May they feel your power of healing
through the care of doctors and nurses.

Take away the fear, anxiety, and feelings of isolation
from people receiving treatment
or under quarantine.

Give us all a sense of greater joy, even in the midst of
our suffering.

Protect all of us,
and bring peace to all in this time.

Amen.

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