

Let All the World Rejoice

I'm going to begin with a time of meditation.

Here we are, the last Sunday of Advent and the end of our prosperity series. The Sunday of Joy! Our Daily Word reminds us Joy, according to Unity co-founder Charles Fillmore is the “happiness of God expressing through humankind.” It is the season when Joy is a popular word and maybe an elusive feeling.

We find Joy in the nativity story as the angels appear to the shepherds in the story in Luke: *In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”*

Joy and praising God in the same verses: that is a convenient pairing for a sermon celebrating the advent Sunday of Joy and the prosperity practice of gratitude. I think it is very interesting that neither Edwene Gaines nor Fillmore's prosperity books contain a chapter specifically on gratitude. Yet Fillmore says in the Revealing Word, “All metaphysicians have found by experience that being thankful for what they have increases the inflow. Gratitude is a great mind magnet, and when it is expressed from the spiritual standpoint it is powerfully augmented.” You may be familiar with memes that say, “Happiness is not always getting what you want but happiness is always appreciating what you have.” Which the closest I can trace is a Confucius quote, “Happiness does not consist in having what you want but in wanting what you have.”

Most of you know and I happy confess that I am a geek. I like science and math and today I'm going to use an algebra metaphor to construct the sermon. Don't freak out because I used the word “algebra”. If $A=C$ and $B=C$, then $A=B$. You don't have to do any math! This is metaphysical algebra.

If Charles Fillmore says that “Prayer is the most highly accelerated mind action known. It steps up mental action until man’s consciousness synchronizes with Christ Mind.”; and Meister Eckhart says, “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough”; then prayer is C, and “thank you is the most highly accelerated mind action known and synchronizes your consciousness with Christ Mind”. See how easy that was! We’re doing metaphysical algebra! Chuck would be proud!

Seriously! Gratitude is not something we just do on Thanksgiving and it is not even limited to a reaction to receiving something. In our Edwene Gaines affirmations we find affirmations about being a joyous receiver and a good receiver and one responsive gratitude affirmation: Large, rich, opulent, lavish financial surprises now come to me and I am grateful. But here is the thing I have discovered about gratitude: it is the measure of the altitude of my attitude. OK, sounds cute Reverend Joy, what does that mean?

Who remembers the song from childhood: “Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, think I’ll eat some worms”? There are many lessons in this and I’ll start with attitude. What are we focused on? Lack, focus on the outer, no self-esteem, no gratitude and to FIX THAT, we will eat worms. In despair we do the very thing guaranteed to make us feel worse! We will wallow in our lack and keep looking straight into the hole in the donut. In this attitude, we are at a very low level of consciousness, vibrational energy, whatever language you want to use for how we feel and think. I have spent time at this level. This life on earth gives us many opportunities to sink down into the depths of despair. There are times of great darkness and sorrow and I have no intention of pretending at Christmas or any other time that there are not times of darkness in life. There just are times of loss and sorrow and pain when it is difficult to wait patiently for the dawn and for new light. So here is what works for me in the times of greatest darkness: gratitude.

Sometimes I am even willing to begin with sort of fake gratitude. You know, the simple stuff we learn to be grateful for as children: thank you for this day, for my family (ok that can be a stretch), for my food, for my dog, etc. Then if you can, stop yourself and immerse yourself in the simple list. Not everyone got today. We have this precious gift of life. Even as we may grieve the loss of a life, we have breath for a reason. We were created for our individual contribution and Spirit continues to choose to give us life and breath for what we bring to the world and for what we receive and enjoy in the world.

Think about family as blood relations and chosen family—those people you choose to be close to whether you are genetically or legally related to them or not. Contemplate one person you care about on earth. What can you **give** to them today? Think about a pet if you have one and the joy it gives you to **care for** that pet.

So I just made a shift. In gratitude I can shift from receiving to giving and not reduce the altitude of my attitude. I stay in gratitude whether I am noticing the gifts I receive from the infinite well of Spirit or I am noticing the amazing gifts I am able to give from the infinite will of Spirit. I shifted myself back into synchronization with the Christ Mind. This is not magic or fake or pretend. This is the intentional consciousness of gratitude that brings us back into alignment with joy and our true nature.

Spirit contributed this article from ideapod.com that says “according to UCLA’s Mindfulness Awareness Research Center, regularly expressing gratitude literally changes the molecular structure of the brain, keeps the gray matter functioning and makes us healthier and happier.” When you are happy “you are more peaceful, less reactive and less resistant. And gratitude is the most effective practice for stimulating feelings of happiness.” Joy is the happiness of God expressing through humankind. How can we refuse to accept the gifts of our true nature? How can we deny gratitude is one of the most powerful spiritual practices we have? How can we turn away from joy?

“The entire Universe loves me” is how Edwene begins her affirmations. The Universe loves me indeed. The Universe created me and you and everyone. Our parents participated in the biology of our human form but the essence of our being, the spiritual expression **we are** is from the stuff of the Universe and its creativity. The eternal divine nature that endures beyond this body is made visible in but not limited to this material world. So it is interesting that we tend to focus so much on this material world. We tend to direct our gratitude to the most immediate and visible source of what we perceive as good. We miss the point made in the gospel of James: “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” There is nothing temporary or changing about the divine Source and yet we forget this invisible substance is the flow we stand in that provides our very life and breath and all that we need and desire to give **and** receive. We forget to direct our gratitude towards God, the Divine Eternal One.

The angels brought the shepherds two messages that holy night. *I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.* This is the message of our own awakened divinity; the spark of perfect life that illuminates every aspect of our being. The great I AM born through us is the good news of great joy and it is for **all** the people. This divinity is not for a chosen few but it is available in and through us all. The second message was *praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven.* The angels brought the message of the **I AM** but not the essence—that is from God. Praising our divine source brings us to the place of oneness we describe as heaven. For that is what heaven is: those moments we abide in oneness and let go of the illusion of barriers and separation. Fillmore describes it as “a state of consciousness in harmony with the thoughts of God.” And therein lies our peace on earth. In gratitude we place ourselves in harmony with the flow; we become a part of the infinite flow of giving and receiving without interruption.

At this winter solstice and full moon weekend I suggest that you try gratitude, in the time of greatest darkness and in the time of fullest light. May Perhaps you will find a path to peace and joy with a heart and mind of gratitude. And maybe, just maybe, we can live from the place of knowing our oneness just a few more moments this year.

I'll end with James Dillet Freeman's Christmas Prayer:

May there always be room in your heart for divinity to find a birthing place. May you be holy as the angels were, faithful as the shepherds were, humble as the cattle were, wise as the Wise Men were. May you have the compassion Mary had and the understanding Joseph had, and may the blessing of the Christ child be yours, not because of his birth night long ago, but because his love is born in you today.

Merry Christmas.