

Power of Joy

Wait! Reverend Joy is out on a limb again! There are only 12 Powers!

Ah, but much of the 12 stuff that Fillmore references in justifying his 12 number turns out to be 13. We talk about the 12 tribes of Israel, led by the 12 sons of Jacob. Keep reading. Jacob elevated two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, to the status of full tribes, replacing Joseph. The tribe of Levi became the “Priestly tribe”, ending up with 13 tribes. But Reverend Joy, there were 12 disciples. Yes there were. And Judas killed himself. The eleven decided to replace him with Matthias, who had been with them from the time of John’s baptism. So there were 13 disciples. Ever hear of a “baker’s dozen”? The 13th is that something extra and special. Like all the powers, it is within us all the time!

What do we already think about the power of Joy? In the Revealing Word, Charles Fillmore says it is “the happiness of God expressed through the perfect idea—[hu]man. Joy and gladness are strength-giving, especially if the mind is fixed on the things of Spirit.” Pierre Teilhard de Chardin says, “Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God.” We at ULV describe our core value of Joy by saying, “Living from our oneness with Spirit, we give radiant expression to a lightness of being.” John 15:11: “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

And Psalm 16 says, “I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy.” I personally feel God has allowed me to see the Pit more than once but I am grateful that Spirit continues to lift me out when I see it and still fall in. Falling and rising again reminds me to keep the Divine as my focus and there is the fullness of joy.

Did you know that the word “joy” appears in the Bible 196 times, not counting the apocrypha. Yet we have somehow made spirituality serious and solemn. “Sacred” and “fun” do not usually appear in the same sentence. We have done this to ourselves! The thing about joy is that I feel we mostly deny ourselves joy. We take it away, ignore, or refuse to give space to joy in our lives. And thus, we have separated ourselves from Spirit and the gifts of God.

Where I come from Memorial Day is called Decoration Day. It is a day to decorate the graves of our ancestors, not just soldiers. It is a family gathering and sometimes you go to more than one cemetery, carrying jars and cans of flowers and reminiscing about our loved ones. One year I remember my brother had a ball and glove in hand as we headed out. Someone said, "We're going to the cemetery. What are you doing with the ball and glove?" My brother innocently said, "I think God likes to play." Indeed. God likes play and joy and lightness. So where did we get the idea that church and spirituality and our relationship with God should be heavy and solemn and NOT FUN? How many of you remember trying to sit still in church and fearing the appearance of the "shushers"? You know, they greet you all friendly at the door but if you are squirming and whispering loud in church they come and stand beside you in the pews and with a finger to the lips go, "SHUSH". My grandmother had a roll of peppermints in her purse to try to stave off the shushers but occasionally it happened to us anyway.

As a minister, I try to welcome our little squirmers. We have our Children's Church downstairs so they can move around and have FUN with their spiritual lessons. It is the nature of children to play. I have noticed on news reports of refugee camps and war torn areas you can still see children playing. They will seek out a ball or a can or a rock and a stick and create an outlet for play. If it is the nature of children, then once upon a time, it was **our** nature. What happened? And how do we reclaim the power of Joy expressing as the happiness of God and the lightness of being through us?

In this month's Psychiatric Times, there is an article titled "Laughter is the best medicine". Not new wisdom, it confirms that there are verifiable health benefits to laughter. The opening paragraph describes laughter as "a physical expression of humor and **joy** that has protective qualities. It's one of the best ways to manage perceptions of stress and to develop resilience and improve psychological sturdiness as it strongly correlates with happiness." Anyone but me struggling a bit with stress and anxiety lately? The article features some science I won't bore you with but laughter can affect pain sensations, sleep loss, depression, blood pressure, glucose levels and immune suppression. For our own good, we need to figure out how to inject more healing laughter into our lives. Maybe that's why some clergy begin their sermons with a joke. Or what they have found in the clergy joke book. Although I have a sense of humor, for the most part I have spared you the clergy joke book. I have one on my shelf. If I lose my sense of humor, I can refer to it. But how much do we value laughter? Serious movie or sill movie, where do you spend your

money? Crime shows or comedy, what do you watch on tv? Now I get that everyone has a different sense of what is funny. Notice I am not telling you what to watch. I just want to raise our consciousness about de-valuing a good laugh. Maybe suggest we evaluate our priorities and consider our health and the power of joy as laughter a priority.

In Matthew, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” In the passage, the disciples were busy being “shushers” and trying to keep the children away from Jesus. He said, No, let them come to me. Even let them be your example. What do you think he meant by ‘change and become like children’?

I can tell you what I don’t think he meant. I don’t think he was encouraging the adults to be childish, demanding to have their way, refusing to share, throwing a tantrum and screaming. Jesus did not say, “Become like a toddler” For some of us, that wouldn’t be much of a change! Children have a sense of wonder and love to play. So what takes us away from the playfulness and wonder of a child?

I don’t know about you but from an early age I was impressed with the belief that being an adult was serious business. Study hard, work hard. Stop joking. Have a plan. Get some goals. Make money and save money. Take care of your family. Be serious! Often I reach a point at which I would really like to resign from adulting. It isn’t fun and I’m tired of it. So did Jesus really mean for us to abandon being adults? Maybe not entirely.

Maybe Jesus was suggesting we have to let go of all the ridiculous, worldly expectations we have about how we **should** act; goals we **should** attain; things we **should** think and say. What if we just focused on loving God and loving one another? What if we relaxed enough to really **see** the wonder in every day?

Have you ever watched a kitten when it was awake? They wear themselves out playing so they do sleep a good bit. But the whole world is a cat toy! They play with sunbeams and shadows and pieces of paper and dust bunnies and curtain cords and shoe strings. Literally anything can capture their attention and turn into a source of wonder and play. Little children are like that. Their toes are a miracle they discover attached to the other end of their bodies. A mud puddle, a flower, a ball, a pan with a spoon. All of these can turn into play when we are unburdened by the weight of the beliefs and expectations we take on as adults. When was the last time you were playful?

I don't mean a card game or Wii bowling. Games that have goals and winners and losers sort of lose the play element. You start trying too hard. In 2015 the unlikely Royals team won the World Series. They didn't have any superstars. They didn't have the best bull pen. No one, not one, picked them at the beginning of the season to win the World Series. The funny thing is a lot of those young men had played together since just after high school. They came up the minor leagues together. Somehow they made playing baseball fun. They truly loved one another and just went out to PLAY! Last season's Eagles team figured out, in the end, how to PLAY! They worked hard the first part of the season, had some success and then lost Carson Wence. It seemed that instead of getting really serious, they relaxed. Nick Foles was an experienced quarterback and somehow they trusted one another enough to just PLAY.

And maybe that is part of the formula about PLAY and about becoming like children. To "enter the kingdom" and become fully in the presence of God we have to **trust** God. Remember last week we talked about the power of Order is "trust the process" of life unfolding? Adulthood is full of worry and planning and trying to control what happens in our world. Why do we labor under the illusion that it is necessary or even *possible* for us to control everything that happens? One reason is because we don't trust the God of our faith to really keep things going in the right direction. Kids trust. Adults may betray that trust. Adults may disappoint one another. But early on, kids don't know that yet. They trust the world is safe to play in. A kitten still has 9 lives—he's going to risk playing a bit. Disappointed by life experiences and forgetting the eternal nature of our inner powers, we can lose our sense of playfulness. Like laughter, we discount the value of play. When was the last time you splashed in a puddle or found a new toy that had **no** work value? Where do you play and how do you play? If **play** is a measure of your engagement with Spirit, how is your relationship going?

Did you know that fireworks date back to 9th century Chinese Tang dynasty? In 1777 on July 4th bells rang, guns fired and fireworks were lit in Philadelphia and Boston to celebrate the first year anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The next couple years were a bit more somber but the celebrations expanded after the end of the Revolutionary war in 1783. Fireworks have represented our sense of joy since the beginning of our country. Katy Perry's song ties fireworks to that inner joy we all carry. Her lyrics say, "Do you know that there's still a chance for you, 'Cause there's a spark in you. You just gotta ignite the light And let it shine.

Just own the night Like the Fourth of July 'Cause baby you're a firework
Come on show 'em what your worth Make 'em go "Oh, oh, oh!" As you shoot
across the sky-y-y Baby you're a firework Come on let your colors burst Make
'em go "Oh, oh, oh!" As we tie American history with our powers, think of the
power of joy as our inner fireworks, bursting forth at our own command.

We have one more expression of joy that I haven't forgotten. It is in our core
value statement: "Living from our oneness with Spirit, we give radiant
expression to a lightness of being."

Some of you may know I have a magic bottle I keep in my very serious, adult
minister desk drawer. It is a bottle of bubbles. When I need to lighten up and
not take myself or the world around me too seriously, I get out the bottle and
blow some bubbles.

Humans came into life with the very breath of God. Breath is Spirit. Just
relax and trust the God of our creation. Blow out some air with no purpose or
goal but to blow a bubble. Let it drift and then disappear. Nothing to store or
save or keep working on. Nothing to compare to anyone else's. Just blowing
God bubbles. We are giving expression to our own **lightness** of being.

Our meditation today is not serious nor does it have to be quiet. Sometimes
that is appropriate and good but I want to move away from the idea that quiet
and serious is the only way to be spiritual. Today we have what I call a "body
prayer". It is an activity that celebrates the life and joy of Spirit within us. We
are all going to blow bubbles! There are six bottles of bubbles in the
sanctuary. Two at the back corners and two at the front corners and two in
the middle. Those of you sitting closest to the corners and the middle aisle
seats, look under the seat and open your bottle of bubbles. Just relax. Take
out the wand, dip in the magic bubble elixir and gently blow some bubbles. It
may take a couple tries to get the breath right. It's ok. Then pass the bottle to
the next person. Eventually we'll all get to blow bubbles and then we'll be
done.