

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 6/10/2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

We feel joy when others do things for us. Receiving gifts or good wishes give us a sense of pleasure. We can also feel joy when we are with others in relaxing or celebrative times. Joy is an important human feeling, and we all crave and covet it.

For Christians and others, but especially for Christians, there is another kind of joy that we can experience. It is called empathetic joy. It is not joy because of something done to or for us. Rather it is the sense of joy we feel when we see other feeling joyful.

My favorite ride at Disneyland is “Peter Pan’s Adventure.” I love getting onboard a pirate ship and then flying—yes, flying—through the nursery, and out over London, and then around Never Never Land. It is flying because there is no track beneath you on which you are riding. You are in the clouds, among the stars, looking down on the lands beneath you. One of my greatest delights is to take people, children particularly, on their initial Peter Pan ride. I love to see the joy on their faces as they experience all these things for the very first time. What I am feeling is empathetic joy.

Again, empathetic joy is something that Christians particularly can experience when we are serving others. When we see someone joyfully receive assistance, we also feel joy. When someone has that look of joy because of something helpful we’ve said or done for that person, we feel joy. The call to serve others is a call for us to spread joy, but also to receive that sense of joy through our acts of service. That’s why the invitation to serve is such an important part of the Christian life.

It is significant to also note that there is a distinction between joy and happiness. Happiness is much more fleeting and momentary. Joy is ongoing. Buying something you’ve wanted will make you happy, but that feeling will often fade once the purchase has been made. Watching an entertaining program will cause you to be happy while it is on and perhaps for a few moments afterward, but again that happiness will soon disappear. Joy, however, can continue for a long time and perhaps be unending. I’m sure many of us can look back on times we have felt joy because of something done for us or because of joy we’ve helped to give. Even remembering these occasions brings joy. The more we make joy-giving part of our lifestyle, the more we will have that enduring sense of joy in our life. Some of the most joyful people we know are those who regularly bring joy to others.

In John 15:10-11, Jesus says, “If you keep My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” Jesus is telling us He has joy when we keep His command to love and serve others. Our service not only brings joy to others and that empathetic joy to ourselves, it also brings joy empathetically to Jesus. Though our primary reason for service to others is as a response to what Jesus has done for us, we also have the promise that this service will be a source of joy to them, to us, and to our Lord.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey