

October 23, 2022
Celebration Sunday
Rev. Kelley L. Becker

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Did you hear those last three words? Find your joy. This TikTok contributor, Greg, ends all his videos that way. Most of the content he contributes features stories about his adventures in teaching, so you can imagine most of the joy he finds is connected to his students. His predictable ending, “Find your joy,” has encouraged me to do exactly that. Back in January, the dreariness of winter, and life in general, had me desperately looking for my joy. And I must admit, because I have mostly believed joy is found within us, not from external sources, I was struggling. I was certain the division, grief, and anger so prevalent in the world, had finally stolen my joy, and it felt like maybe it was gone for good. So, I decided, since joy didn’t seem to be inside me, I would look elsewhere.

And I did what I always do when life makes me uncomfortable. I retreat to books. In January and February, I read book after book about joy. I was determined to figure out where mine had escaped to and retrieve it. The first book I picked up was one I read a while ago when the Modern Lit. class read it, *The Book of Joy*, by the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, with the help of Douglas Abrams. I went immediately to the parts I had underlined, hoping my notations had somehow foreseen this moment in my life, and I read this, “...lasting joy--joy as a way of being...is probably closest to the ‘shining contentment’ or the ‘spiritual radiance’ born from deep well-being and benevolence.”¹ In other words, joy is more than “don’t worry, be happy” and just pretending everything is okay. To find joy, I decided, I needed to change my perspective, from being self-focused (Oh, where has my joy gone!) to being other-focused, from my own angst to compassion for other people. I needed to remember that all of us suffer, and because of that, we do not suffer alone. It isn’t about a comparison of our own suffering with another person’s suffering, but a union, a realization that we are all connected for no other reason than we are all in the midst of living very human lives which are not always easy.

¹ Dalaie Lama and Tutu, Desmond, *The Book of Joy*, Penguin Random House: New York, 34.

It occurred to me that, while joy does live inside each of us, the external connection we have with each other helps us access it. Our relationships, if we will let them, have the potential to spark that joy that lives inside us. In a world that seems so divided, full of people who had to stay away from each other to stay healthy, it is no wonder a lot of us have struggled to find our joy. I can't tell you the number of times, when I've mentioned I was trying to find my joy, people have said, "If you find it, let me know." What I can report is that every book I read about joy found a way to say, "To know joy, we need to love and care about each other." Full disclosure: One book did say that researchers have found that round and spherical objects make human beings feel a sense of happiness and well-being.

So, of course I promptly bought this and hung it in my house.



And, I must admit, I was surprised by how happy it makes me to look at it. I also will say, the happiness quickly fades when I am not gazing at it.

While I appreciate my felt garland, I have a feeling the loving and caring about each other wisdom will, in the end, prove to be the way forward. As I've spent time this year trying to feel joyful again, I admit, I've been frustrated at times because it doesn't seem like finding joy should be so hard. It should just happen, right? Small children don't have to look for it. It just happens to them when they see someone they love across the playground. They run to them, belly-laughing, arms outstretched. I've concluded we just need to give ourselves permission to let it happen to us.

I think our black and white world has helped us forget that more than one thing can be true at the same time. The world can be a mess *and* we can feel joy. Feeling joy does not discount the suffering in the world, it helps us resist it.

Author Molly Fumia, who has written a lot about the nature of grief, wrote, "To be joyful in the universe is a brave and reckless act. The courage for joy springs not from the certainty of experience, but the surprise. Our astonishment at being loved, our bold willingness to love in return — these wonders promise the

possibility of joyfulness... despite the world's sorrows..."² Feeling joy is not tone deaf to the world's problems. Joy finds us when we realize we don't have to face any of our problems alone, when we greet one another with outstretched arms and laughter.

Joy happens when we know we are loved and when we love in return. I firmly believe that is why DCC is such a joyful place to be. In fact, visitors comment to me that they feel a sense of joy when they walk in this building. Being loved and accepted, and being given the opportunity to love other people, sparks joy. In reflecting on 2022 so far, I have found joy in the many, many moments and ways in which you, through your generosity and service, have loved people well. You have given your financial support and your presence...all because of love.

I hope in the weeks and months to come, you will continue to contribute your resources and consider getting involved in our shared ministry in new ways. If you are a foodie, there are meals for you to make and serve (and eat). If you are a crafter, there are kiddos who need you to show them how to do what you do. If you would like to help plan worship, change light bulbs, or get involved in the ways in which we reach out the community, I promise, we need you. There are so many great things happening and so much to look forward to.

Today, as we bless the 2023 pledges, we also celebrate what our 2022 offerings have done so far. My hope is that you will feel a deep sense of joy as you are reminded of the ways we have welcomed, grown, and served with open arms and hearts. It is with joy that I say, none of us can do this alone...and we have done so much together.

Take a look!

Slideshow-DVD on request

Thanks to Anna and Callie for their work on that video and thank you to all of you who contributed to our shared ministry. I am excited to see what is next! I hope you are too!

If you think DCC is a place you would like to belong as we make a difference together, I invite you to come forward to join the church as we sing. Please stand in body or spirit.

² Fumia, Molly, *A Grateful Heart*.