

## Questions for Discussion

Begin discussion in the larger group.

- Where are you experiencing joy this Advent season?
- What are your hopes for joy in your life, in your community, in our world this Advent?
- What moments of your life have you experienced the most joy?
- Have you ever experienced a loss of joy?
- How do your senses experience joy? (Sight, touch, smell, taste)
- What are your sources of joy?
- What lessons has love taught joy?
- Who in your life exhibits joy?

**JOY**  
**By: Becky Serpe**

My husband and I recently drove to Kansas to visit with my son and his beautiful family. Young grandson Jonah is a proud first grader at Flint Hills Christian School in Manhattan. He was eager to share with me his most recent lesson from the day. He stood tall and proud and with great gusto asked me if I knew what Joy was. I stumbled for a second as I tried to think what the “right” answer would be for Jonah, when he burst out with Joy, J-O-Y – J is for Jesus, O is for Others, Y is for ...ummm,...You! You have to have them in the right order for it to spell Joy – got it, Grandma? I’ve got it, Jonah, I replied with a laugh! Thanks for the great reminder to keep my life in order. It was a most joyous moment!

The following day when I was relishing the quiet of early morning, I pulled out my issue of “These Days” and you won’t believe what I read...J-O-Y – the same lesson that Jonah had taught me the evening before. God knows me well. God knows that I need to hear things more than once for them to stick in my head and more importantly for them to stick in my heart.

As I’ve been reflecting on things in life that bring me joy, I have found an interesting common denominator. Joy can come to me in many forms, but never does it come without a connection to something. I can find joy in a connection to another person, as in my sense of joy when Jonah was teaching me, or in those special times of deep connection with my husband or other loved ones. At times it is a connection to animals – like our amazing dog who greets me so energetically and with unconditional love when I walk in the door. I tend to also find joy in nature when I am amazed by the beauty of a clear blue sky, trees that are gifting us with a magnificent show of color in the fall, or new growth in the spring. And even (oh shudder to think that winter is coming again) the incredible beauty of a new snow fall.

Merriam-Webster tells us that joy is a feeling of great happiness. Scriptural references define joy a little differently – great happiness, yes, but with a bit of a twist. Robert Schuller; an American Christian televangelist, pastor, motivational speaker, and author, was quoted as saying, “Joy is not the absence of suffering. It is the presence of God.” I would modify that a little bit. In place of the word presence, I would substitute the word connection...a connection to God, or to others. In fact, in most of the nearly 200 references to joy in the Bible position joy as being found in a spirit of connection.

The philosophy of interconnectedness is coming to light these days. Pope Francis wrote of it in his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si*. In paragraph 240, he writes: “The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures...Everything is interconnected...”

Ilia Delio ,a current day theologian and Franciscan Sister with doctoral degrees in both science and theology, said that "matter is not composed of basic building blocks but complicated webs of relations. . . .

Interconnectedness lies at the core of all that exists." She longs for us to see what she sees: the vast interconnectedness of human beings, God, and the universe. "I want everyone to see that we are loved into being at this moment just as we are by a God of unconditional love.”

I have come to the belief that it is at times when I see these solid, loving connections, connections in right relationship, when I feel pure joy. Connections between people, with the animal world, with nature, with the pure beauty and majesty of this universe, and of course to God. God who is made visible in all of these things.

So the next time I hear Joy to the World, I will think of it a little differently. I will remember Jonah’s enthusiasm as he defined JOY for Grandma. He had a joyful heart, and the eagerness of a six year old boy with a secret to tell. He had an enviable, whole-hearted love and connection to God. I will think of the lesson Jonah taught of keeping right order - to Jesus, to others, and to then to myself - but also of the interconnectedness of us all.

**Sacred Harp Song- sung by the Church School Children**

Come, friends and relations, let's join hearts and hands,  
The voice of the Baptist is heard in our land;  
Let's all walk together and follow the sound,  
    And march to the place where redemption is found.  
The time is soon coming by prophets foretold,  
When Zion in glory the world shall behold.  
The angels and archangels sing round the throne  
    With thousands of stars, but their joys are all one.