

# SERMON

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## Delight in God

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Isaiah 55:10-13; Psalm 148

Think with me for a moment, of a time when you have experienced extreme Joy. A time when you just couldn't stop yourself from smiling, or even laughing. There is nothing quite so wonderful as Joy. It is universal. It crosses all cultural, all gender, and all age boundaries. In fact, in the Hebrew language, there are 27 different words to express joy.

In our modern-day hospitals, we have begun to recognise the healing powers of joy. A doctor once said:

“There ain't much fun in medicine, but there's a good deal of medicine in fun.”

The movie *Patch Adams* is a true story that illustrated the power of the joy of laughter – in the movie, the clown doctor brought laughter and joy to all the patients in the hospital; and as their spirits were lifted through the joy of laughter, their bodies responded with healing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzqGA1ldvYE>

Path Adams is not just a good movie - current medical research from The Cancer Treatment Centres of America, lists the physical benefits of laughter as:

- Enhance oxygen intake
- Stimulate the heart and lungs
- Relax muscles throughout the body
- Trigger the release of endorphins (the body's natural painkillers)
- Ease digestion/soothe stomach aches
- Relieve pain
- Balance blood pressure
- Improve mental functions (i.e., alertness, memory, creativity)

..... the list goes on and on. In fact, maybe we should all spend time in laughter at church! Some of you have heard me tell about a friend of mine that was suffering from cancer and became a certified laughter leader – she would lead workshop where the theory was that “we simulate laughter to stimulate laughter”. Cancer Treatment Centres use laughter therapy, knowing that laughter is contagious. I expect we've all been in a room filled with joyful laughing people at some time, and it makes us smile and laugh - and when we are filled with so much Joy, we can all reap the benefits.

Our scriptures today, reminds us to be filled with Joy. The Joy of knowing God. In Isaiah 55, we hear a message to the Israelites. Now, to put this message in perspective, we need to understand a little bit of the background. The Israelites had been taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had led his armies against Judah: many people had been killed, Jewish temples had been destroyed, thousands were taken captive, and Jerusalem was left in ruins. The Jewish people that went into exile would only be allowed to return to Jerusalem after 70 years of exile. Now that's a very grim picture! They had lost everything – their homes, their families, their livelihoods and way of life. And yet, the Israelites are told that they:

“... will go out with Joy, and be led forth in peace” (Isaiah 55: 12)

Joy and Peace – wow! They are told to celebrate with joy in the face of adversity! That’s a pretty tough idea. In fact, they are told that the whole of creation will even join in the celebration of Joy with them.

There’s a lot of creation imagery in this passage: the ‘mountains and the hills’, the ‘trees and the fields’. The lush evergreen pine tree replaces the sparse thorn bush, and the sweetly perfumed myrtle bush will replace the thorny brier thicket. It reminds us that we can find Joy in God’s creation around us. I think this scripture from Isaiah ties in neatly with our Psalm scripture: we saw from our children’s time that the Psalmist teaches us that all creation is called upon to Praise and Delight in God with exultation. And I also think that it is no coincidence that we read these scriptures as we enter into Creation Time in our church calendar – it’s a time when Christians around the world observe ways to find God in Creation.

The story of the exile from Babylon is an old story, and yet there are so many parallels to us today. As we think of a nation that had lost everything, we are reminded of the people in Houston waiting on rooftops to escape flooding following Hurricane Harvey; of the island Barbuda where 95% of the population has lost everything; of Puerto Rico, U.S Virgin Islands, Turks and Cacaos and all the other Caribbean islands that have been left stunned and devastated by the destructive force of Hurricane Irma; it has been described as one of the strongest and most catastrophic storms ever to hit the region.

I think it is easy to draw comparisons between the sorrow and fears of the Israelites in exile, with our present-day climate fears. And yet, we as people of faith, just like the Israelites in exile, we are called upon to celebrate with Joy in the face of adversity.

And how do we find such amazing Joy.

Well, we are reminded in Isaiah 55 that faith in God’s word will always give us a deep Joy. Verses 10-11 reminds us how God’s word is dependable: just like rain and snow waters the garden to makes things grow and provides plentiful harvests for the sower (although I am sure there are some farmers here that do not want to hear about snow just yet)– but God’s word that is revealed to us through the prophets and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, gives us all that we need to be able to celebrate with Joy. BUT, and here is the big but, it is our responsibility as people of faith, to follow God’s teachings, and to act in a world full of inequalities and injustices, so that others may learn to live with joy in the knowledge and presence of God.

I know that it is not possible to be happy all the time; each day brings trials and troubles. Just ask the folks in the Caribbean. But *happiness* and *true joy* are different things. Happiness is often fleeting: a momentary pleasure, a feeling of luck soon overcome with pain and sorrow. But Joy is both more satisfying and longer lasting. Joy often does not come with outward displays. Joy may be quieter, richer, deeper. Joy touches our inner feelings, our spiritual selves. Joy comes when we live with the experience of God’s grace and presence in our lives. And when we know God in that way, then we can truly sing with our hearts, whatever the circumstances, and we can ‘Delight in God!’ And when we do live our lives full of the Joy of knowing God, I can promise you that, just like the healing nature of laughter, the effect of the radiant Joy of knowing God will be truly contagious. So, let us go out with Joy, and live our lives full of delight in God. Amen.