

Joy in Every Circumstance...

Sunday, December 13, 2020 Celebration

Opening Video: *Christmas Can-Can* by Straight No Chaser

Wasn't that fun? Sometimes we just need to do things because they're fun...they bring us Joy. And in their entertaining way, these guys paid homage to three of our December celebrations. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Good morning and thank you for joining us in celebration this morning. If you're new with us this morning, my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, and I am the Pastor and Spiritual Director for the Mystic Heart Spiritual Center. I'm so happy to have you all here this morning. If you can't tell, I love to have fun...I love play...I love celebration.

It's so important to take the time to celebrate, to feel and share the absolute Joy of being alive, especially during the holiday season...especially this year. It has been different this year...that's for sure. And even with everything that is going on in the world, there is so much Good always unfolding, isn't there? Those of us who are listening this morning have the time, the leisure, and the technology to be able to gather in the Zoom Room, to stay socially connected even in times of physical distancing. We're here together, and that's worth celebrating.

We tend to forget that Celebration is an important Spiritual Practice, just as important as Prayer, Meditation, Study, and Service. Celebration is an outward expression of Joy, of Gratitude. And Joy is the quality of God that we're celebrating during this 3rd week of Advent.

The season of Advent marks the period of waiting for the Light to return, for the birth of the Christ Child...or the revealing of Christ Consciousness within each one of us...on Christmas Eve. You can see that we have four candles burning this morning on the Advent wreath. The white candle in the middle is the God Candle, representing the Divine Spark. The first purple candle represents Faith, the second purple candle burns in honor of Peace, and today the pink candle represents Joy.

You can also see that our Menorah is lit this morning in celebration of Hanukkah. Tonight at sundown will mark the 4th day of Hanukkah. Jewish people all over the planet are in the celebration of the Festival of Lights. This holy day signifies *enoughness*; it reminds us that God's Abundance is ever-present. There is enough for everyone to have all needs met. And this miracle of light speaks to us on a personal level. It asks us to shine light on the dark places in ourselves and in our world, even when we think we cannot. It asks us to continue to shine when there seems not enough. This miracle speaks of a faith that is steadfast in times of apparent lack or difficulty; and to the blessing that comes from waiting patiently for whatever is happening to unfold in God's perfect timing. We celebrate Hanukkah because it speaks to us of God's infinite abundance and reminds us that all of life is a miracle, and that what seems impossible is possible when we have faith.

And there are other holy days and celebrations at this time of year...the cultural celebration of Kwanzaa in the African American Community, which begins on the third day of Christmas this year, and Bodhi Day on the 2nd of January.

We are such a rich and diverse culture. We have so much to celebrate, so much to be grateful for.

Let's take a moment before we go any further to remember and sense our Joyful connection as a human family... coming together with a common desire...to be the change we wish to see in our world...to take an active part in the conscious evolution of humanity...so that we can leave the world a better place for our children and their children.

Let's breathe together, allowing ourselves to settle into a field of Absolute Joy, Gratitude, and Aliveness, where we are all One Life, inseparable...interdependent...each of us an irreplaceable strand in the tapestry of Life. Feel into this moment, into the gathering of sacred community.

Now let's expand our connection. Visualize with me a global web of consciousness, each of us a point of Light, all interconnected across the planet...let's include all beings who in this moment, might be sitting in meditation or prayer, might be attending sacred services...acknowledging the Presence of the Divine... consciously connected by our whole-hearted devotion...feeling the collective intention that brought us here...feeling the impulse to grow and evolve that's awakening in all of us.

As we sense this very intimate connection, our Light shines brighter and brighter, until our separate points of Light melt into one, radiant, beaming Light.

As we feel our Oneness, we breathe in the Joy, the Peace, the Power, and the Life present in this moment, and then send it back out into the atmosphere on the out breath...knowing that these qualities Guide and Govern all that unfolds...no exceptions.

This is our time of Celebration and Communion. In consciously establishing our connection with one another, and with all beings, we empower our work here...our prayer, meditation, and communion ripples out and touches lives in ways we may never know. We are making a difference. Just breathe that in for a moment.

Coming back into this space, we open our eyes, our hearts, and our minds. Take a look at who is here celebrating with you this morning. This is your Spiritual Family, should you choose to adopt one another. This is one of your support systems. These are people who care about you, who are there for you if you need anything. We are social animals...interdependent. Community is so important.

Our Community's theme for the month of December is *We Are the Light*...and for the last two weeks, at the Taizé, we began the season of Advent with *Adventures in Waiting* and *Peace is What I Am* as the focal points for our meditative journeys. We agreed that Faith is

much stronger than hope...that hope leaves room for doubt to creep in, and Faith is a deep knowing. And we talked about how Peace can only come to our world as we hold Peace in our hearts and minds...as we live as Peaceful beings living in Peaceful homes, neighborhoods, cities, and countries.

So now that we are grounded in Faith, and seeking to live from our most Peaceful place, we must remember the importance of Joy in our lives. Today's message, *Joy in Every Circumstance*, is really about the underlying Joy that exists in every moment...that is available any time we choose to recognize it.

I'm not talking about the kind of giddy happiness that bubbles up when we are experiencing something pleasurable. I am talking about the deep and abiding sense that all is well, just as it is...and just as it is not. I'm talking about that sense that we all have somewhere deep inside, that no matter what is happening on the surface, it's all going to be okay in the end. There's a song that's coming to mind right now...

"This Joy I have, the world didn't give it to me. The world didn't give it and the world can't take it away."ⁱ Unless I let it.

But sometimes *the world* can put on a pretty convincing show...that all is NOT okay *in the world*, and so how can I be Joyful? Lots of people are sick...people have died...have lost jobs, homes, businesses This has always be true...it is part of the human experience; but it feels more present, more impactful right now in these times of pandemic, growing unemployment, political and social unrest, increased violence and homelessness. We are doing our part to contribute in whatever way feels appropriate. But the same actions designed to keep us healthy, leave some people feeling safer and others feeling like their freedoms have been taken. There is a sense of separation between neighbors..

Families and friends cannot gather as they might have this year for Christmas celebrations. I don't know about you, but the holidays have been a little bit strange this year. Things are changing...we don't know what to expect from day to day. I have to admit, this year hasn't been easy for me, either.

And still, the undercurrent running below all of it is...It's going to be okay. Breathe. Wait. Watch. Listen. No need to do anything...everything is happening in God's time, in Divine Order. It's going to be okay.

I don't usually do this, but I want to share a song with you at this point in the message, because it has touched me more deeply this year. It has a question for us...and an answer.

Embedded Music: *Where Are You, Christmas* by the Pentatonix

My world is changing, I'm rearranging. Does that mean Christmas changes, too?

What do you think? If I'm changing...if we're changing as a society, then everything is changing. Even Christmas. So, I have a question for you...how many of you like change...just

absolutely love it when everything you are familiar with turns upside down? We don't like it, do we? And yet, change is the only constant in life. So maybe this is just Infinite Intelligence telling us to get over ourselves...stretch...loosen up...try something new. For our own good...to get us out of our collective rut. And for the good of the planet...to give our blessed Mother Earth a break.

If we look back over human history, there have been periodic times of cataclysmic change...periods of massive evolutionary growth. There seems to be a long period of build-up, and then like a light switch being flipped, everything changes. The name that has been given to this change is *paradigm shift*. And these periods have always been difficult for humanity to adapt to because our brains are wired for repetition, for habit; we like the familiar. But as humans, we also have the ability to choose. We can choose how we respond to whatever is happening in the world, and we can choose to make changes gradually and willingly. Responding to times of great change with a sense of flexibility, a sense of playfulness, increases our access to Joy. The Joy is always available...a curious, childlike attitude just makes it more accessible.

So let's flip this current situation on its proverbial ear. Let's look at how we have become more flexible through this time of great change. What have you done differently this year? Have you spent more quiet time at home...time for reflecting and just being? And hasn't it been nice? This set of circumstances has given us the opportunity to take a collective breath...a time out. And in this time out, there is a deep sense of relief...that we don't have to be going and doing all the time. And in that deep relief, there is a profound sense of Joy. Have you experienced it? Take a moment right now...settle into your quiet place...feel the Joy. "Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God." (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin)

The qualities of the Divine are present within us...Joy is always present...and we can call it forward into our lives consciously. The spiritual quality of Joy is part of our nature as expressions of Spirit, as children of God. It's in us, now and always. It's not dependent on the circumstances of our lives.

Ernest Holmes once wrote "humanity is divinity revealed." How do we reveal spiritual reality in our human circumstances?

There are two practices that you may find helpful in your spiritual walk. First: Be compassionate toward yourself. Give your inner perfectionist/critic the day off and accept that where you are is good enough. We can all stop pretending. We don't have to put on a false spirituality to hide how human we are. Isn't that a relief? It's okay not to feel happy and light all the time. Breathe that in...let yourself relax...surrender and allow life to unfold.

And *then* you might try the second practice, which is simply to walk by Faith. Affirm with me now...*I trust the "Joy of the Lord is my strength" and this Joy is already here—whether*

I can access it in the moment or not. I also know in my heart and in my soul that the full expression and experience of my Joy will return. I will feel my Joy again.

Psalm 30:5 (KJV) reminds us that “weeping may endure for a night, but Joy cometh in the morning.” When we are willing to feel our sadness, or our anger or frustration, it opens our capacity to feel *everything* more fully. We become able to feel our Joy more deeply and more authentically.

In the season of Christmas, we are given the opportunity to birth the light of Christ into our lives anew. Join me in finding the courage to live in Joy—a Joy that is so rich, so deep, so robust, that it carries and sustains us through every struggle and challenge we face.

Join me today in knowing your inherent Joy, your inherent Faith, your willingness to breathe into whatever stretch life has called you to...to gracefully change and adapt with the flow of life...to be content with what is...and to open yourself to the greater possibility of what can be.

Let’s pray – speaking this for myself, and by the Principle of Unity, knowing that it is equally True for you...

Knowing that there is only the One Thing going on here, and that One Thing is God...Spirit...Infinite Intelligence...expressing Itself by means of Its creation. And that is me, and you, and every person on the planet...and every animal and plant...every mountain and valley...every star in the sky, and every grain of sand. There is nothing else. All that I see, and that which is beyond sight...all that I hear and all that is imperceptible...all that I sense and that which is beyond all experience...is an emanation of the Living God.

And so I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I Am, that each of us is, a living, breathing, expression of the Divine, walking the earth...the hands and feet of God, the Heart of Compassion and Generosity, the Voice of Truth, the perfect expression of Strength and Resilience...the most perfect Joy, in Service to the Whole.

In this sacred space, I give thanks for the time we have shared here this morning. How sweet it is to know that this community that supports and uplifts me. What a precious gift to know that all needs are met, that all answers are given, whenever I remember to ask, and to patiently wait for God’s Abundance to appear in whatever form serves the Greatest Good. As I open to greater and greater possibility, I become a clear channel through which Faith, Peace, and Joy may flow. As I come to know the Truth of who I Am, I Am free. And as I remember that everything I do ripples out to affect the Whole, my life takes on greater meaning and purpose. By my actions, through your Divine Order and Compassionate Presence, the world is blessed, and I am blessed.

Trusting in the power of prayer...not only the spoken Word, but the deep feeling and faith that infuse that Word...I let it go, trusting in the Loving and Lawful Presence to take it and

make it so. Here and now, I release it fully and completely, watching in wonder as it comes into full form and experience in my life, and in the lives of each one here. I call it done...and so it is. Amen!

Music: *Christmas Wish* by the One Voice Children's Choir

Offertory: *Bohemian Hanukkah* by Six 13

ⁱ *This Joy I Have*, as performed by Sista Monica Parker