

Happiness Is Different From Joy
Sermon Preached by Rev. Dr. Donna Schaper
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I have been happy for 42 years in the ministry. I have not always been joyous. Joy is different than happiness. You can have good work, a beautiful family, a good home and be happy, if happy is to be contented. You can also watch the meaning of your life's work collapse in the face of active shooters, or environmental degradation or the loss of church institutions and their beautiful buildings.

I have been in a kind of joy crisis but not happiness crisis for a long time now. It all started when someone said that the mainstream churches only had 24 more Easters, if current aging-out trends continue, alongside of deferred maintenance on buildings too expensive for the remnants to retain.

I found some joy by a kind of subtraction. Go ahead, die, I said to the mainline churches which have sustained me all this way. Let them go. Before that, though, remove the pews from your buildings and give them a chance to be useful. Judson let its pews go and that's why we have a congregation that is growing younger, who still can't manage its behemoth of a building. One out of two ain't bad.

We removed our pews in 1969, making space for dancers, artists, musicians, meditators and just plain rentals to keep our space alive and humming and drumming. We thought of these practices as mission consistent, not mission aberrant. We still do. The key to saving a church and a congregation is the way we think about outsiders. If they are more important to us than the insiders and the pew sitters, then all will be well. If only the insiders matter, let the buildings go. They have lost the Jesus way and aren't really needed by Jesus any more.

I extended this metaphor to imagine removing the plaque from our hearts. Like taking a statin.

Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit with in me. Cast me not away from the joy of thy presence but restore unto me the joy of salvation. Salvation: safety, security, shalom.

Restored.

I know we need to remove the pews and we need to remove the plaque. Then we will find our way back on the road to the divine. Living or dying as a temple –the way Jesus describes it as being destroyed and then being rebuilt, no matter how many years of hard work we have put into the building – is not the important thing. The joy of salvation is the important thing.

John Calvin: *The purpose of life is to praise God and to praise God forever.* That's all. That is the joy.

Joy never goes away. It is always there waiting for us to notice it in its grand securing detail.

So here I offer three ways back to the road to joy. *Joyful, joyful we adore thee, god of glory god of might.*

1. Practice the art of subtraction, not the art of addition. You may be happy once the car is washed but you won't be joyful. Get all those things, like saving the temple out of your way. When you have less, you have more. This doesn't mean that you don't buy dresses on your unretirement trip to Paris. You can buy things, have things, enjoy things. But you don't allow them to get in your constant way, as though having that dress you passed by in the street fair thrice will bring you joy. It will for a while but then it will just bring happiness. And given that it is linen, it will likely not wash up well.
2. Notice the details. Notice. The Details. My mom's different colors for daffodils. *“Gorse, lemon, mustard, honey, saffron, ochre.”* She wrote that in one of her notebooks, one that I received after she died and finally had the time to notice that she had noticed. On my drive up here I stopped long enough to read the bulletin board at the Milk Run Diner on Route 145. *“Seven missing goats, all female, ran off in the storm, won't come back”.* June 30th.

“White Persian kittens, 200 dollars each, good price.”

“Bricklayer needed, no slackers need apply.”

The way the blue geranium was stolen off the front porch – after giving us five beautiful weeks of color.

3. Unbidden. Joy comes unbidden. The way the Dalai Lama just bursts out laughing for no apparent reason. Infectious joy....in trying to crack the hard shell of his own ego, he years to wake up his heart and soul.

David Brooks, the journalist, after his marriage of 27 years crumbled, looked inward and faced some difficult truths. David Brooks, *The second Mountain, A Quest for a Moral Life*. He ties the shortcomings of western culture to his lack of joy. He misplaced joy.

The Carvel ice cream on the subway: *“it's my birthday, I wanted to have a eucharist with you.”*

You can find joys by noticing the details, the wonderous details of existence. You have to subtract allegiances to smaller security and versions of happiness on your way to noticing. You may build a temple but temples will bring you only happiness. Joy comes unbidden. Not bidden. It is right there, hidden in plain sight. You don't build it. It builds you. You don't live in buildings. You live in joy.

Resources:

<https://www.ncrp.org/2018/01/philanthropy-extraordinary-opportunity-help-religious-institutions-crisis.html>

(This article above also has a lot on the Judson Model of hyper use of sacred space in the second part of the article.)

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/eco-catholic/reimagine-worship-spaces-resurrect-churches-disuse>

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/opinion/5-dos-and-5-donts-using-your-church-building-well>

[The Church With the \\$6 Billion Portfolio - The New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/08/nyregion/trinity...)

www.nytimes.com/2019/02/08/nyregion/trinity...