

“Hopeful Joy!”

A book recommended to be a resource for this new Worship Series is **The Book of Joy by the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu with Douglas Abrams**. The book was an intentional result of a weeklong visit between Archbishop Tutu and the Dalai Lama around the time of the Dalai Lama’s birthday. They met in his residence in exile in northern India, which he eventually moved into after China took over his home country of Tibet. They arranged their meeting to discuss the subject of Joy and the plan was for a description of their conversations to result in a book. As I read the book, it became clear to me those spiritual leaders were genuine friends. Among the things they had in common was a wonderful sense of humor and their meetings included frequent banter – teasing one another.

Those two special leaders explained, “To celebrate one of our special birthdays, we met for a week in Dharamsala to enjoy our friendship and to create something that we hope will be a birthday gift for others. There is perhaps nothing more joyous than birth, and yet so much of life is spent in sadness, stress, and suffering.” **“We hope this small book will be an invitation to more joy and more happiness.”** ... “Lasting happiness cannot be found in pursuit of any goal or achievement. It does not reside in fortune or fame.” **“It resides only in the human mind and heart, and it is here that we hope you will find it.”**

Archbishop Tutu said, “Discovering more joy does not, I’m sorry to say, save us from the inevitability of hardship and heartbreak. In fact, we may cry more easily, but we will laugh more easily, too. Perhaps we are just more alive.” **“Yet as we discover more joy, we can face suffering in a way that ennobles rather than embitters.”** The Archbishop did not say this, but I believe it is appropriate for me to say, a “Joy” we can have, which ennobles us as we face suffering, is a “Hopeful Joy”!

In case anyone has forgotten, this new Advent Worship Series is, in part, a celebration of the Christmas Carol, **“Joy to the World!”**. Clearly, focusing on “Joy” is closely related to the thrust of that carol. But today, we aren’t just putting emphasis on “Joy”, instead, we are seriously considering Hopeful Joy! Although the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu didn’t specifically list “Hopeful Joy” in the table of contents of their book, it seems to me that their joy was, indeed, one full of “Hope”.

Our Scriptures from Isaiah and Paul’s Letter to the Romans certainly encourage us to have “Hopeful Joy”. Isaiah is especially recognizable in its declarations of hopeful joy. Specifically, in **verse 2a**, Isaiah stated, **“In the days to come the Mountain of the Lord’s House will be the highest of the mountains.”** The future orientation of that verse provided a reason for hope! They could have joy because of God’s Promise of a New Age – a New Reality based on our Divine Parent’s Presence and Instructions. **Verse 3 disclosed, “Many nations will go and say, ‘Come, let’s go up to the Lord’s Mountain, to the House of Jacob’s God so that He may teach us His Ways and we may walk in God’s Paths.’ Instruction will come from Zion; the Lord’s Word from Jerusalem.”**

The “Hopeful Joy” we see in our Isaiah Reading went on to provide an additional reason for Joy as we anticipate with Hope the future. **Verse 4 stated, “God will judge between the nations, and settle disputes of mighty nations. Then they will beat their swords into iron plows and their spears into pruning tools. Nation will not take up sword against nation; they will no longer learn how to make war.”** Yes, God will bring about True Peace! No one will have need of weapons. Weapons will be transformed into tools to help provide everyone food!

Both the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu share in the Hope of such a Peace among all nations and people. That Hope is part of their seeking and encouraging Joy, so although they did not put it exactly that way, they are calling everyone to “Hopeful Joy”.

After the Archbishop asked the Dalai Lama why large crowds come to hear him, he went on to say, “What they’ve come for is that you embody something, which they feel, because some of the things that you say, in a sense, are obvious. Yet it’s not the words.” **“It’s the spirit behind those words.”** “It is when you sit and you tell people that suffering, frustration, are not the determinants of who we are. It is that we can use these things that are seemingly negative for a positive effect.” **“And I hope we can convey to God’s children out there how deeply they are loved.”** “How deeply, deeply precious they are to this God. Even the despised refugee whose name no one seems to know. I look frequently at pictures of people fleeing from violence, and there’s so much of it. Look at the children. I say that God is crying, because that is not how God wanted us to live. But you see again even in those circumstances, you have these people who come from other parts of the world to try to help, to make things better. And through the tears, God begins to smile.” **“And when God sees you and hears how you try to help God’s children, God smiles.”**

Earlier, the Dalai Lama said, “From the very core of our being, we simply desire joy and contentment. But so often these feelings are fleeting and hard to find, like a butterfly that lands on us and then flutters away.” “The ultimate source of happiness is within us. Not money, not power, not status. Some of my friends are billionaires, but they are very unhappy people. Power and money fail to bring inner peace. Outward attainment will not bring real inner joyfulness. We must look inside.” **“Sadly, many of the things that undermine our joy and happiness we create ourselves.”**

The Dalai Lama continued, “We create most of our suffering, so it should be logical that we also have the ability to create more joy.” **“It simply depends on the attitudes, the perspectives, and the reactions we bring to situations and to our relationships with other people.”** “When it comes to personal happiness there is a lot that we as individuals can do.” ... “Most people never pay much attention to the ultimate source of a happy life, which is inside, not outside. Even the source of physical health is inside, not outside.”

Archbishop Tutu responded, “It’s wonderful to discover that what we want is not actually happiness. It is not actually what I would speak of.” **“I would speak of joy. Joy subsumes happiness. Joy is the far greater thing.”**

Later in that discussion the Archbishop asked the Dalai Lama, “‘Let me ask you,’ ‘You’ve been in exile fifty-what years?’ ‘Fifty-six.’ **‘Fifty-six years from a country that you love more than anything else. Why are you not morose?’**”

“One of my practices comes from an ancient Indian teacher,” the Dalai Lama began answering the Archbishop’s question. “He taught that when you experience some tragic situation, think about it.” **“If there’s no way to overcome the tragedy, then there is no use worrying too much. So, I practice that.”**

Indicating the difficulty of having a hopeful joy in the midst of suffering, the Archbishop said, “At some point, you will be in anguish. We are told in the Christian tradition to offer up our suffering and unite it with the anguish and pain of our Savior and thus use it to improve the world.” **“It does help you not to be too self-centered. It helps you to some extent to look away from yourself. And it can help make that anguish bearable.”** “You don’t have to be a believer in any faith to be able to say, Oh, aren’t I blessed that I have doctors, that I have nurses qualified to look after me, and that I can be in a hospital? That might just be the beginning of moving away from being so self-centered and concentrating too much on me, me, me, me. You begin to realize, Hey, I’m not alone in this.”

“The Dalai Lama jumped in to affirm the truth of what the Archbishop was saying. ‘Too much self-centered thinking is the source of suffering. A compassionate concern for others’ well-being is the source of happiness.’”

The Dalai Lama said, “So as you rightly mentioned, a self-centered attitude is the source of the problem. We have to take care of ourselves without selfishly taking care of ourselves. If we don’t take care of ourselves, we cannot survive. We need to do that. We should have wise selfishness rather than foolish selfishness. Foolish selfishness means you just think only of yourself, don’t care about others, bully others, exploit others.” **“In fact, taking care of others, helping others, ultimately is the way to discover your own joy and to have a happy life. So that is what I call wise selfishness.”** “You are wise,” the Archbishop said. “I wouldn’t just say wise selfish. You are wise.”

“For every event in life,” the Dalai Lama said, “there are many different angles.” **“When you look at the same event from a wider perspective, your sense of worry and anxiety reduces, and you have greater joy.”** “The Dalai Lama had discussed the importance of a wider perspective when he was telling us about how he was able to see the calamity of his losing his country as an opportunity. It was jaw-dropping to hear him ‘reframe more positively’ the last half century of exile. He had been able to see not only what he had lost but also what he had gained: wider contact and new relationships, less formality and more freedom to discover the world and learn from others. He had concluded, “So therefore, if you look from one angle, you feel, Oh, how bad, how sad. But if you look from another angle at that same tragedy, that same event, you see that it gives me new opportunities.”

So, an important aspect of living “Hopeful Joy” is to have that wider perspective – to look beyond ourselves to the needs of others and to help them or a Jesus called us to do – “Agape Love” one another. Indeed, in our Reading from Paul’s Letter to the Romans, the Apostle pointed out to followers of Jesus Christ, who needed “Hopeful Joy”, **“The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work He began when we first believed.”** Paul went on to specify, **“Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!”** Being dressed in Christ is following his example, teachings, and commands. The simplest expression of that is to agape love, instead of selfishly seek to benefit oneself.

Although the Dalai Lama is not a Christian, he puts agape love into practice in his thinking and actions. Let us live “Hopeful Joy” as the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu live. **Let’s be God’s Agents of “Hopeful Joy” as we seek ways to reach out to others with our Divine Parent’s Agape Love in our thoughts, prayers, and actions. Amen.**