

Or maybe a change does come along, and it's not good. A frightening word from the doctor. Bad news about a loved one. A paycheck with a pink slip in the envelope. Change----and now we wish that things had stayed the same.

Years of our life can go by sometimes and it seems like there is no meaning, no reason, no purpose.

And we wonder----what's the point of life? What's it all about, anyway? Why am I here?

Maybe the disciples felt the same way after Jesus was crucified. Maybe they wondered what their time together had meant. Had Jesus' ministry made any difference? Had they added to it at all, made any kind of a contribution, or had they just been in the way?

Because they still didn't understand after Jesus was dead, and even if the tomb was empty, what did it all mean? They had walked all over Galilee, down through Samaria, out through Judea, and down into Jerusalem.

Now THAT had been a day, the day they entered Jerusalem: the crowd waving palm branches and shouting "Hosanna! Blessed is the one

who comes in the name of the Lord!” and Jesus riding a donkey into the city!

And then that special night in the upper room, the last supper before the crucifixion. They had never felt so close to him, until he said, “One of you will betray me!” What was the foot-washing all about? What was that bit about “This is my body and my blood”?

The disciples must have tried to make sense out of it all. They must have wondered what was the point of the past three years? Jesus had healed so many, fed so many, taught so many! Did anyone get it? Was anyone else changed by Jesus, or was it only them?

And maybe not even them. What difference did it make, everything they had done with Jesus? How could life just go back the way it used to be? On the other hand, how could it NOT go back to normal?

What else was there to do?

And then, suddenly Christ was there in the room with them. They couldn't quite believe it! He was dead, and dead people don't just pop in for a visit!

A dead person in the room must be a ghost, they thought! So they were afraid. Some translations say “terrified.”

Now, when else have people been terrified and afraid in scripture? Whenever an angel appears. Mary and Joseph were both afraid when angels came to them to announce that Jesus would be born. The shepherds were terrified when the angel appeared in the sky to tell them Christ was born as they watched their flocks.

The fear came because a being from heaven came down to earth. Except no one was afraid of Jesus. He was only a baby, after all. Who's afraid of a baby? And then as he grew up, no one was afraid of him because he seemed just like them---just another boy, another man.

And maybe that was the point. Fear gets in the way of being able to get to know someone else. Fear means you don't listen, you don't build a relationship.

But then, even with that relationship already in place, the disciples were afraid when Christ came into the room with them-----afraid because he was supposed to be dead.

When we don't understand, we are often afraid. And they didn't understand how he could be there when they knew he was dead.

So he ate a little piece of fish to prove he wasn't a ghost. That calmed them down enough that they could listen to him. And they listened as he explained what the scriptures really meant. All of what Moses had said, all of what the prophets had said, all that the psalms said was fulfilled in his life.

All of the Hebrew Bible---the Old Testament---pointed to Jesus Christ.

It was only possible to understand what the scriptures really said when you read them knowing about Christ---about his life, his death, and his resurrection.

Knowing about Christ, KNOWING CHRIST, made everything make sense. Knowing Christ made the lives of the disciples as they followed him make sense.

It hadn't been for nothing. Their lives had changed and so had the lives of other people who had known him.

It really wasn't possible to go back to their old lives once Christ explained what it all meant---how God was still seeking a relationship with all of God's people, God's children!

Once they understood the scripture, that was obvious!

So once the disciples understood the scriptures, Christ told them that they were to proclaim repentance and forgiveness to the whole world!

Why? Because they were witnesses to the truth of the Good News of Christ!

They had experienced repentance and forgiveness for themselves, so now it was up to them to share it with the whole world!

Which might have seemed frightening---almost as frightening as thinking a ghost had come into the room!---except that Christ reminded them that God had promised not to leave them without help and power!

God had promised to send the Holy Spirit, who would make it possible for them to do what he was sending them to do.

Without the presence of the Holy Spirit, spreading the Gospel around the world would not be possible.

At each step of this process----convincing them he was not a ghost, opening their minds to understand the scriptures, commissioning them to

Being freed from fear, being emptied of everything negative, their hearts were filled with joy! So filled with joy that they felt compelled, they HAD to be in the Temple, worshiping God!

Filled with joy and no longer afraid of the religious leadership, they went to the Temple to worship and praise God for the gift of Jesus Christ, and to wait for the Holy Spirit to be given to them.

They came back from Bethany with great joy!

What is it that fills you with joy? Joy is different from happiness. I'm sure the disciples had been happy to be with Jesus, happy to follow him and hear him teach. But joy! That's a whole level higher!

Happiness might be a warm puppy, but joy is knowing God is real and true and alive and loves us!

Joy is not being afraid anymore because whatever the world can do to hurt you is nothing compared with how much God loves you. And God isn't going anywhere!

The disciples went to the Temple to express their joy! To me, this scripture says that they really couldn't stay away! That they felt compelled to be in God's house as the only appropriate place to express their joy!

Where do you go when you are filled with joy? What do you do when joy takes over your heart? How do you worship and praise God?

Do you at least stop and say to God, Thank you, thank you, thank you?

Maybe you write a poem or a song? Maybe you just start whistling or singing?

Maybe you come to church and share your joy with the rest of us!

Other people can share your joy, reflect it back to you, deepen it, extend it!

Maybe you find a quiet place or a beautiful spot and pray a silent prayer!

But what if you don't know what joy feels like? What if you're stuck in a rut, trapped in an endless round of the same thing, day after day?

Plodding along, not seeing the presence of God in your life?

What then? How do you find the joy?

It can be difficult. I won't tell you it's easy.

Start small.

At the end of each day, ask yourself, what was the best thing that happened today?

Just that---one small thing---the least horrible thing, if that's as good as it gets---but the best thing that happened that day. And tell God thank you for it.

Then find a second one, if you can. Two good things, or at least two not-terrible things.

And say thank you to God for those two things.

Continue on. If you notice something good happening, don't wait till the end of the day---say thank you to God when you notice it.

Keep increasing the number of good things you notice every day.
Keep saying thank you to God for them.

If it helps, read the Bible, especially the Psalms.

If it helps, meet with a friend regularly so you can share joys together.

If it helps, spend time in prayer and meditation. Start with the thank you's to God, and then bring your struggles and lay them at the feet of Christ.

Most of all, **MOST OF ALL!** Listen for God's voice. Feel God's love for you.
Imagine love wrapped around you.

Because it isn't just imagination. It's true. It's just that sometimes we don't take time to believe it.

Come into God's presence, into God's house. Listen to the music of the organ, the singing of the choir and the congregation. Listen to the word of God, in scripture and in the words of the liturgy and the message.

Remember that you are not alone in your search for joy, and also remember that there are those near you who can share their joy with you!

Remember, Jesus Christ is alive! He came to preach repentance and forgiveness! He came to show us that God is love and that God loves us, each one of us, enough that he became like us.

Christ came to save us from lives of meaninglessness and futility! He gives our lives purpose and direction!

The purpose is to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

The direction is toward a deeper relationship with God.

The Holy Spirit is present with us always, to guide us toward that deeper relationship.

And the result is joy, joy in the morning, joy at noon, joy in the darkest night.

Joy that leads you to worship and praise God happens when you recognize that Christ is present in your life and that you are loved by God!

Believe and let the joy shine in your life! Let it pour out of you in praise and thanksgiving to the one who is the source of all that is good and holy.

Praise God!

Amen.