

Joy in Every Season



**Small Group Bible Study
Summer 2020**



Pastor Lauren J. Wrightsman ©

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Joy in Every Season - An Invitation: Joy in the Promise

When was the last time you used the word “joy?” There are, of course, certain times in the year in which the word is used more frequently. During the Advent and Christmas seasons we often hear of “times of joy” or “Christmas joy,” but joy is a gift given to us in each and every season.

“Joy” is a short, but powerful word and is often defined as being “the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires.”¹ We often use the word as if it, by itself, is a possession, or something that is only present in the feeling of well-being.

Take a look at the synonyms for the word ‘joy’ as found on <https://www.thesaurus.com/browse/joy>

SYNONYMS FOR *joy*

| | | | |
|--------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| amusement | animation | gratification | rejoicing |
| bliss | delectation | hilarity | revelry |
| charm | diversion | indulgence | solace |
| cheer | ecstasy | jewel | sport |
| comfort | exultation | jubilance | transport |
| delight | exulting | liveliness | treasure |
| elation | felicity | luxury | treat |
| glee | festivity | merriment | good humor |
| humor | frolic | mirth | pride and joy |
| pride | fruition | prize | regalement |
| satisfaction | gaiety | rapture | |
| wonder | gem | ravishment | |
| alleviation | gladness | refreshment | |

Our Christian faith tells us that joy is not a seasonal experience or emotion. Joy is NOT the same as glee, or satisfaction, or bliss. Joy, in a faithful sense of the word, is not dependent on happenings or whether things are going well, or not. Joy remains, even amidst the suffering in each and every season.

The book of Psalms has more references to joy than any other book in the Bible. We are reminded that “*all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy,*” (Psalm 5:11a, NRSV), and “*You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy;*” (Psalm 16:11, NRSV).

Joy comes from the confident assurance that God is good. God has blessed in the past, in the present, and will continue to in the future. Writer Kay Warren reminds us:

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/joy>

“Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in all things.”²

Warren goes on to write,

“Joy is a settled conviction ABOUT God. It’s a quiet confidence IN God. And joy is a determined choice to give my praise TO God.”³

This summer we will be exploring the gift of joy at Roseville Lutheran Church through worship, small group ministry and our carry-out camp for children ages 2-102. As we gather under the theme, *“Joy in Every Season,”* we will share the things we’ve lost and buried, look for the potential of budding hope, celebrate individual blooms and watch together as the garden begins to burst with color.

In Isaiah 55 there is a beautiful vision of peace and joy in the kingdom of God. It says,

“For you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace, the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.” (NRSV)

Join us online for worship at www.rosevillelutheran.org/worship/stream for this season of joy.

This summer we will watch for the gift of joy in both the highs and lows of life, and will give thanks to God when we see all of the ways this world bursts with joy. Join us for this season of joy!

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Summer 2020

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² Warren, Kay. *Choose Joy: Because Happiness Isn't Enough*. 2012. Revell. Grand Rapids, Michigan. Pg. 31.

³ Ibid. Pg. 32.

Joy in Every Season - Joy in Belonging

Group Session #1

Week of Sunday, June 14, 2020

Check-in

Considering the synonyms for “joy” as listed in the Invitation, what words stand out to you? Which ones do you use for joy? Why?

Scripture - Luke 3:21-22

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, then heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” (NRSV)

Opening Quote - Friederich Nietzsche, atheist, commenting on the Christians he knew

“They would have to sing better songs for me to believe in their Savior: his disciples would have to look more redeemed.”⁴

Baptism is one of two sacraments of our Lutheran faith, but this sort of ritual washing was not entirely new to the people of Jesus’ day. Prior to John the Baptist and Jesus’ baptism, the Jewish ritual of immersion, *mikva’ot* (mikvehs) had existed for quite some time. This Jewish ritual was done before you could enter into worship, and was an immersion experience not necessarily for hygiene or for cleanliness, but for spiritual purity so that one could enter into the presence of Yahweh. This Jewish ritual held the belief that one immersed oneself in the waters and emerged from that experience purified.⁵

We, too, are purified in this sacrament of Holy Baptism - washed and made new to live redeemed and forgiven in the world.

⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, 1844-1900. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra : a Book for All and None*. Cambridge :Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁵ <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/video-gallery/o/origins-of-baptism>

In the writings of Martin Luther, Luther expressed the Sacrament of Baptism in the *Small Catechism* this way,

What benefits does Baptism give?

*It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.*⁶

The Baptism of our Lord was the first event of his public life, a public declaration of this new love poured out by God to God's people. As a people of God, baptized in the joy of God's blessing - that is, eternal salvation. This is the joy that we are called to live in each and every season of our life!

Questions for Discussion

Looking for joy in the world

Belonging is a primary human need. Beyond food and shelter, nothing promotes human flourishing like having a people and place of belonging. Do you agree with the following statement: *When we are called into "belonging" with God, we are called into "belonging with all people."* Why, or why not?

Finding joy in my neighborhood

In our life of frequent mobility, it is sometimes hard to feel a sense of belonging in our own neighborhoods. How many times have you moved in your lifetime? How long have you lived in your current home? How do these types of transitions impact your sense of belonging?

⁶ <https://catechism.cph.org/en/sacrament-of-holy-baptism.html>

Experiencing joy in my life

Andy Crouch⁷, presents a 2 x 2 chart that shows the correlation between being both known and loved. Being known without being loved is rejection. Being loved without being known is merely fitting in. Being neither loved, nor known, is being ignored and rejected entirely.

| | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Rejection (Known, not loved) | Belonging (Known and loved) |
| Ignored and rejected (Not known, not loved) | Fitting in (Not known, but loved) |

How do you experience a sense of belonging? In what ways have you experienced these different types of relationships and connection?

Prayer

Loving God and Lord, thank you for the gift of baptism, this gift where I am renewed and called into new life. May I live this day knowing that I belong fully to you, a beloved child, called to live a life of joy in the community of others and in your presence. Amen

⁷ Crouch, Andy. *Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk and True Flourishing*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 2016.

Joy in Every Season - Joy in the Challenge

Group Session #2

Week of Sunday, June 21, 2020

Check-in

Who is one of the most joyful people you know? How do they live out their joy?

Scripture - Luke 15:8-10

"[Jesus said] Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (NRSV)

Opening quote - Mike Mason, author

"If joy does not arise out of the midst of tragedy, it will not arise at all. Christian joy is rooted in darkness, chaos, meaningless and sorrow...Separate joy from sorrow and there is nothing left."⁸

There is a world of difference between "happiness" and "joy."

It is often said that "happiness" depends on "happenings." In the parable of the lost coin, it may appear as if the woman is only happy because of the "happening" of finding the lost coin. Jesus, however, turns this parable from the experience of individual joy an act of God in redeeming the one who is lost. The question becomes not, *"What makes me joyful?"* as much as *"What makes God joyful?"* And the answer is: When the lost are found! This is the joy of heaven, the joy of God!

So often we become concerned only with our individual happiness, but the joy of the Lord are God's acts of redemption and forgiveness poured out upon you and, indeed, the entire world! Even in times of

⁸ Mason, Mike. *Champagne for the Soul*. Regent College Publishing. 2011. Pg. 5.

chaos, darkness and sorrow, God's joy is still at work. As God's children, we can experience abundant, overflowing joy knowing that God will never leave us or forsake us.

Questions for Discussion

Looking for joy in the world

The Advent hymn, "Joy to the World" is a well-known hymn and is sung in many languages.

Verse one:

*Joy to the world, the Lord has come
Let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare him room
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing*

How have you heard "heaven and nature sing" in the world this past week?

Finding joy in my neighborhood

The woman with the lost coin never stopped in her pursuit of finding that which was lost. Neither does God! We can often become tired of looking and searching for something that seems elusive, or hard to find. Is there someone in your neighborhood or a community that would benefit from some persistent love? A ministry that needs persistence and faith? In what ways could you reach out in help or support?

Experiencing joy in my life

There are times where we feel worn down and worn out. Writer Brene Brown shares in her research that joy is directly correlated to vulnerability. In other words, the more vulnerable we are, the more joy we ultimately experience.

Writer Kathy Escobar writes, “When we are closed off, self-protecting, hardened, afraid, locked-up, we can’t experience joy. When we allow ourselves to hurt, to feel, to live, joy seeps in... which reminds me of Psalm 126:5, which says, ‘*Those who sow with tears will reap with shouts of joy.*’”⁹

In what ways and in what situations have you found joy even in times of searching or want?

Prayer

Gracious God, fill me again with your spirit of joy. I confess that hard times can often leave me feeling anxious and defeated. Remind me again, that you will never leave me and you have promised your faithfulness to me. Allow your spirit to work within me. Thank you that your love is greater than anything I may face. Amen

⁹ <https://shelovesmagazine.com/2013/joy-elusive/>

Joy in Every Season - Joy in Serving

Group Session #3

Week of Sunday, June 28, 2020

Check-in

In what ways have you experienced joy this week?

Scripture - Luke 6:20-23

Then Jesus looked up at his disciples and said:

*Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God."*

*"Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.*

*"Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.*

"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets." (NRSV)

Opening quote - Mahatma Gandhi

"[T]he Sermon on the Mount... was delivered not merely to the peaceful disciples but to a groaning world."¹⁰

As children we often heard stories that ended with the phrase, "And they all lived happily ever after." Who doesn't like a story with a happy ending? As adults we read these stories to our children and grandchildren, but we know that such stories are not true. Life, even a life filled with faith, is filled with sorrow, weeping and hunger and thirst. There is, indeed, a "groaning world" that we are a part of and called to live and serve in.

¹⁰ Gandhi, M.K. *What Jesus Means To Me*. Compiled by : R. K. Prabhu First published : September 1959 Rs. 12/- Printed & Published by: Navajivan Publishing House Ahmedabad 380 014 (INDIA).

The experiences of poverty, hunger and grief cause feelings of isolation, and yet, the Beatitudes remind us that God enters into these times and offers us blessings. In our call to love and serve others, we become living witnesses of God's steadfast and abiding joy and blessing, even (and maybe, especially) in times of strife and hardship.

Questions for discussion

Looking for joy in the world

The Beatitudes challenge the ways of the world. In what ways is the world "groaning" and hungering for blessings?

Finding joy in my neighborhood

It's been said that, "One cannot love without serving." What are some opportunities for you to love others through service? Have you discovered new ways to love and serve during the recent global health crisis?

Experiencing joy in my life

The word “beatitude” means “a state of utmost bliss.”¹¹ However, theologian Leon Morris observes, “*Jesus promised His followers that they would be absurdly happy; but also that they would never be out of trouble.*”¹²

How do you reconcile these two things in your daily life? How do you live this out?

Prayer

Lord of love, guide me this week, this day, this hour, to hear more fully of your love for me. Send me out this day to be among the poor, the hungry, the grieving. Help me to show the world your love through the work of my hands and ways in which I speak. Help me, Lord, to be one of your disciples, loving others in your name. Amen

¹¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/beatitude>

¹² Morris, Leon. *Luke: an introduction and commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. Pg. 127.

Joy in Every Season - Joy in Times of Doubt

Individual Session - No regularly scheduled small groups this week

Week of Sunday, July 5, 2020

Check in

Thomas was nicknamed, "Doubting Thomas" because of his doubts about the resurrected Lord until he felt Christ's wounds himself. What would your "faith nickname" be?

Scripture - Luke 24:36-43

While the disciples were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.
(NRSV)

Opening quote - *We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight*, hymn

*We walk by faith and not by sight;
with gracious words draw near;
O Christ, who spoke as none e'er spoke:
"My peace be with you here."¹³*

Doubt is a struggle for many of us. Even well known Christian leaders have been plagued by times of doubting. Thomas the disciple has forever been known as "Doubting Thomas" after he doubted Christ's resurrection until he was able to touch the wounds of Christ. Mother Teresa once wrote to her friend, the Rev. Michael van der Peet in September 1979, "*Jesus has a very special love for you. As for me, the silence and the emptiness is so great that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear,*"¹⁴

¹³ Evangelical Book of Worship. *We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight*. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Augsburg Fortress, Publishers. 2006. Hymn #635.

¹⁴ Mother Teresa: *Come Be My Light : The Private Writings of the "Saint of Calcutta"*. New York: Doubleday, 2007.

There are times in all of our lives when we wonder: “*Where is God? Does God hear my prayers? Does God really love and care for me?*”

The text for this week has a single phrase that is central to our understanding of faith and doubt. We are told that “*While in their joy and disbelieving and still wondering...*” Jesus spoke. They were experiencing the joy of the resurrection - their risen Lord was right in front of them - and yet they experienced disbelief at what was before their very eyes. Jesus doesn’t wait for them to have unwavering faith, but appears to them in the *midst* of their disbelief and wondering.

We are reminded that even during times of doubt, grief, and despair, the joy still comes to us as a gift through the presence of our risen Lord.

Questions for Discussion

Looking for joy in the world

The promise of Easter and the resurrection is not a one time event - it is a promise that is lived out each and every day, in every season.

How do you see the joy of “Christ alive” in the world today?

Finding joy in my neighborhood

Jesus appeared to the disciples during a time of doubt. Is there someone in your circle of friends, family, neighborhood, who has helped you in your times of doubt or wondering? If so, who was that person? What did they do for you / say to you during this time?

Experiencing joy in my life

Think about a time in your life where you lost track of time - not the *actual* time - but lost track in a good way. A time when you were fully awake and present to the life and joy around you. How was the promise of Christ alive within you at that moment?

Prayer

God, loving Spirit, and Lord, I come to you this day thankful for your presence in your world and in my life. You see my fear and doubt and replace it with hope, peace, love and joy. Guide me this day to bring this life-giving joy to others, in your name. Amen

Joy in Every Season - Joy in Daily Bread

Group Session #4

Week of Sunday, July 12, 2020

Check-in

What is one material possession that you have that brings you joy? Is it tied to a person? A memory?

Scripture - Luke 9:10-17

On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured.

The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place." But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people." For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each." They did so and made them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them

to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces. (NRSV)

Opening quote - from Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*

Give us this day our daily bread.

What does this mean?

God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with Thanksgiving.

What is meant by daily bread?

*Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.*¹⁵

The story of the feeding of the crowd people is the only miracle that appears in all four gospels. While some of the details may change, the story largely remains the same.

Jesus has been teaching and preaching to a large crowd and his disciples approach him and say that they should let everyone get home for dinner. Jesus disagrees and says, “*You give them something to eat.*” The people are divided up and the food is distributed - five loaves and two fish - and there is plenty to eat, enough for leftovers as well!

What is interesting to note is that just prior to this scene with the loaves and fish, Jesus had gathered the twelve together and sent them out on their missionary journeys with the words, “*Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money...*” (Luke 9:3, NRSV) Jesus is reminding them that all that they need is provided by our Lord. The daily “bread” of health and hope, neighbors and friends, bread and drink - all are provided and given to us. For this we give God our thanks and praise.

Questions for Discussion

Looking for joy in the world

When the disciples packed their lunch that day, they had no idea what a blessing of joy their small pieces of bread and few fish would bring to the hungry crowd. What small gift could you use to feed a world that hungers not only for food, but for love, hope and joy?

Finding joy in my neighborhood

When Jesus asked the disciples how much food they had, they had already seen him heal the blind, raise the dead, cure the sick, and so much more. They had just returned from the villages

¹⁵ Luther, Martin. *Luther's Little Instruction Book (the Small Catechism of Martin Luther)*. Champaign, Ill. : Boulder, Colo. :Project Gutenberg ; NetLibrary, 1994.

around them where they had been performing miracles themselves. They knew of the power of God - but had never thought about asking for a miracle for the entire crowd. Until this time, with the exception of the wine in Cana, the miracles had been for individuals.

As you consider your family and friends, the neighborhood in which you live, what would your “miracle prayer” be on behalf of those around you?

Experiencing joy in my life

Since an early age, we have been taught that “ $1+1 = 2$.” Taking that mathematical logic a step farther, our minds simply can’t make sense of this miracle of feeding over 5000 with just five loaves and two fish. In what ways has God performed miracles of provision for you?

Prayer

Lord, I confess that so often I look at my life with eyes that don’t see the generous blessings around me. Open my eyes to let me see more readily the joys of your blessings around me each and every day. Amen

Joy in Every Season - Joy in Healing and Growing

Group Session #5

Week of Sunday, July 19, 2020

Check-in

What joyfully surprised you this week? An email? A card? A phone call? The chirp of a bird on a walk?

Scripture - Luke 5:17-26

One day, while Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting nearby (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the one who was paralyzed—"I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home." Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen strange things today." (NRSV)

Opening quote - C.S. Lewis

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."¹⁶

¹⁶ Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillan, 1960.

The friends of the paralytic have heard about a man named Jesus. We don't know what these friends knew about the man named Jesus, but they had heard about the miracles he had performed. We can only imagine the conversation that must have taken place on their way to the house where Jesus was. Their hearts were hopeful even though their burden was heavy.

When they arrived, they were dismayed that there was no hope to get close to him - that is, until, one of them had the idea to take their friend up to the roof and tear it open to connect their friend with this healer. In this joyous miracle, the paralytic not only received physical healing but spiritual healing as well and we are told that they were "*amazed and filled with awe.*"

Questions for Discussion

Looking for joy in the world

The power of God's love can surprise us in the ways it heals and restores us and the world. In what ways have you seen the miracles of healing and restoration in the world this week?

Finding joy in my neighborhood

If your friend fell and broke their arm, you would call 911 or take her to the hospital. If you had a neighbor who was hungry, you would bring them a meal. In any of these situations, you see a need and you know how to take care of it.

How does this scripture challenge you as you consider ways to introduce people to the joy of healing found in Christ?

Joy in Every Season - Joy in Community

Group Session #6

Week of Sunday, July 28, 2020

Check-in

Do you remember those moments of being picked for a school sports team or activities? How did it feel when you were chosen? How did it feel as others were chosen before you?

Scripture - Luke 6:12-16

Now during those days Jesus went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. (NRSV)

Opening quote - Henri Nouwen

"Do not hesitate to love and to love deeply. As you love deeply the ground of your heart will be broken more and more, but you will rejoice in the abundance of fruit it will bear."¹⁸

There is an ancient legend first told by Christians living in the catacombs under the streets of Rome. In this legend the angel Gabriel meets Jesus in heaven after his resurrection on earth.

The angel greets Jesus and asks him, "Lord, who have you left behind to carry on your work in the world?" Jesus tells the angel about the little band of fishermen, farmers, and housewives who he has commissioned to carry out his joy and promise into the world.

"But Lord," said Gabriel, "what if they fail you? What if they lose heart? What if things get too difficult and they let you down?"

¹⁸ Nouwen, Henri. *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom*.

Jesus replied, "There is no Plan B. There is no back up plan. They are it." Gabriel is aghast, "Nothing else? What if they fail?"

"Gabriel," Jesus explained patiently, "they won't fail."¹⁹

We often think of these named twelve disciples as the only disciples Jesus had. He had, however had hundreds, if not thousands of other disciples - including you! And just like those twelve disciples, Jesus is sending you out to share this message of joy. The disciples were ordinary in every way. Not one was known for their study of the Torah, or had any outstanding talents or abilities. They were, in fact, prone to mistakes, fears and uncertainties - just like us!

Questions for Discussion

Looking for joy in the world

Jesus is about to change the world in the calling of the disciples. Before he named each and every one of them, he spent time in prayer. We don't know what words this prayer contained, but what do you think Jesus prayed for? Who did Jesus pray for, and why?

Finding joy in my neighborhood

After Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples were sent out into the world around them to preach and teach in Jesus' name. Simon Peter is probably one of the best known for his travels throughout the countryside and nations. Andrew and Philip went throughout Asia (modern Turkey), John founded six churches, Matthew in Parthia (northern Iran) and then Ethiopia.

We might think that these disciples had extraordinary talents and gifts, but they were just ordinary people - sent out in the name of Christ.

What "neighborhoods" is Christ calling you to? Are some of them familiar to you? Are some of them foreign?

¹⁹ Brouwer, Wayne. *Splitting the Day of the Lord: The Cornerstone of Christian Theology*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, Oct 24, 2018.

Experiencing joy in my life

What “ordinary gifts” do you have that could be used to share this message of joy for every day, every season? Perhaps you have the gift of friendship, or a gift of seeing needs, or perhaps you have a gift of writing.

Where is Christ calling you to use these gifts?

Prayer

Christ our Lord, our source of joy, I thank you for the ways in which you lead me and guide me each and every day, and in each and every season. While I am not one of the twelve apostles, I am called to be your disciple. Teach me, lead me and guide me to be a conduit of your joy and love to the world and my neighborhood. May your joy live in me and through me, in each and every season. Amen