



# FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

Ann Arbor, Michigan

May 12, 2010

## Pastor's Reflections

by Stacey Simpson Duke

This past Sunday we had an interesting discussion in our Young Adults Church School class. For the last several months, we've been working our way through Paul's letter to the Philippians. This week, we looked at one of the most well-known verses of this letter, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." (Philippians 4:4). Turns out, we all had different understandings of what it means to be joyful.

Some of us understand happiness and joy to be different words for the same thing - a feeling that results from circumstance. Others of us understand them to be two different things - happiness is an emotion, joy is a choice, an attitude, or a gift. Among those who believe joy is something different from happiness, some argued that it comes naturally to our species while others thought it instead requires discipline of thought and action. I tend to fall in the camp that sees joy and happiness as distinct from each other, but honestly I'll take either one - joy and happiness - and as much as I can get.

It was an interesting discussion, and relevant, since everyone would like to be happy (and/or joyful!). How many books have been written on the subject of how to find happiness? Gretchen Rubin spent a year working to be a happier person by changing small concrete things in her life; she chronicles her efforts and results in her book *The Happiness Project: Or, Why I Spent a Year Trying to Sing in the Morning, Clean My Closets, Fight Right, Read Aristotle, and Generally Have More Fun*. At the end of her year, she declared that she really was happier - the little choices she made each day did add up to a happier life. (And I'm sure she's even happier now that she has a bestseller on her hands!) It does seem true that we can actively make mindful decisions, choices, and changes that can lead directly to more happiness.

What does any of this have to do with Christian faith? Can we make ourselves happy, or joyful? Are we meant to do so, or is that selfish? In Frederick Buechner's book *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*, he writes:

In the Gospel of John, Jesus sums up pretty much everything by saying, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). He said it at the supper that he knew was the last one he'd have a mouth to eat. Happiness turns up more or less where you'd expect it to - a good marriage, a rewarding job, a pleasant vacation. Joy, on the other hand, is as notoriously unpredictable as the one who bequeaths it. (57-58)

It seems to me that joy comes as a gift, possibly as a result of cultivating, over a long period of time, habits of mind and disciplines of the spirit. We allow ourselves to be shaped towards joy over the course of our lifetime, through the daily disciplines of prayer, mindfulness, service, community. Over time we find that we are able to do as the Letter of James counsels, "consider it all pure joy" when we face trials of any kind - circumstance will not dictate the condition of our spirit.

In the end, joy becomes an act of subversion. Maya Angelou once said, "Laugh as often as possible. You must. Because the world will offer you every reason to weep. So as often as possible, you laugh. That, I think, is part of the Great Love." The world does offer us many reasons to weep, and as people of faith we must not be glib about those. In the face of them, though, choosing hope and opening ourselves to joy is a sign of our trust in God.

Celebration is a spiritual discipline. In Philippians, Paul tells us to rejoice always. Eugene Peterson paraphrases the verse in *The Message*: "Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, *revel* in him!" That would be a fantastic daily discipline to challenge ourselves toward - every day to find a reason to celebrate God. Actively look for God's presence in your daily life, and revel in it!

All children are welcome to worship with their families. After the Time as Children portion of the worship service, preschoolers may go to the nursery for childcare and children in Kindergarten - 3rd grade are invited to Children's Worship.

## **Children and Youth Christian Education**

NURSERY care is available on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor from 9:30am - 12:30pm.

### K - 2nd grade:

10:30 - 11:30 Children's Worship and snack (Rm. 202A)

11:30 - 12:30 Church School (Rm. 202B)

### Youth (7<sup>th</sup> - High School)

10:00-11:00 Worship

11:30-12:30 Church School (Room 107)

### 3rd - 6th grades

10:00 - 11:00 Worship

11:00 - 12:30 Church School (Room 201B)

## **Adult Christian Education 11:30 - 12:30**

### **Acts of the Apostles/Acts of the Holy Spirit**

Sue Ellen Glover, Leader

Lounge

We are exploring how the Holy Spirit is empowering believers to carry the good news of Jesus Christ beyond Jerusalem and empowering them to live so that their lives are witnesses to this good news.

### **Young Adult Class**

Paul & Stacey Simpson Duke, Leaders

Room 108

This class consists of conversational Bible study, discussing the letter to the Philippians and its application to our living. "Young adult" is defined as mid-twenties to 40(ish!).

### **Other Adult Education Opportunities:**

#### **Wednesday Bible Study (Wednesdays, 1:30—2:30 pm; Memorial Lounge)**

Pastor Stacey Simpson Duke leads a study of the Gospel of Mark. Join us for fellowship and study. *The last class will be held today, May 12th. The traditional end-of-the season lunch will be held on May 19th at 12 noon at Weber's Restaurant.*

#### **Adult Small Groups (ChristCare):**

Centered on Bible study, fellowship, mission, prayer and worship, we currently have two groups: one which meets monthly and the other which meets every other week. See Stacey, Paul or Sue Ellen for more information about joining a group.