

Joy, Seeing, and Being

The Psalmist wrote, “This is the day that the Lord has made! We will rejoice and be glad in it!” (Psalm 118:24). Today I want to talk about the impact of seeing and being on our experience of joy in life. Author [William Butler Yeats](#) once quipped, “The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper.” The poet, [Mary Oliver](#), apparently learned the power of focusing our attention, of seeing, and the joy that it brings, expressed in her poem, *Mindful*:

Mindful

Every day
I see or hear
something
that more or less
kills me
with delight,
that leaves me
like a needle
in the haystack
of light.
It is what I was born for—
to look, to listen,
to lose myself
inside this soft world—
to instruct myself
over and over
in joy,
and acclamation.

Nor am I talking
about the exceptional,
the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant—
but of the ordinary,
the common, the very drab,
the daily presentations.
Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help
but grow wise
with such teachings
as these—
the untrimmable light,
of the world,
the ocean's shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?

Jesus had done a good bit of traveling, speaking and healing wherever he went. He realized that there was plenty of Spirit to go around and decided to entrust his closest followers with ministering to villages around the region of the Sea of Gallilee. They had watched Jesus and knew his approach, his ethos, and now they were getting kicked out of the nest to teach and heal in Jesus’ stead.

Think about this scene for a moment. How do you think these closest followers felt when Jesus told them what he wanted them to do?

Have you ever been in a similar situation, where someone you looked up to – maybe a parent, or teacher, or mentor, or friend, or boss – empowered you to do something that you hadn’t done before? Immediately I thought of some childhood memories like learning to ride a bike or waterski. Both were terrifying at the time, but I trusted the person who was coaching me. During my sophomore year of high school, I tried out for the lead male role in a musical. My dad’s coaching to really become the character, and not just a 15-year-old pretending to be the character, gave me the courage to go for it, and I got it. People believing in me have helped me take leaps of faith that were terrifying, but they turned out pretty good for the most part.

What did they help me do, us do? See myself differently, the challenge before me differently, the playing field differently, the world and its inhabitants differently.

After some period of time, those close followers of Jesus returned to him and reported amazing accounts of people being transformed by the Spirit of God working through them. In response, Jesus said:

“I know. I saw Satan fall, a bolt of lightning out of the sky. See what I’ve given you? Safe passage as you walk on snakes and scorpions, and protection from every assault of the Enemy. No one can put a hand on you. All the same, the great triumph is not in your authority over evil, but in God’s authority over you and presence with you. Not what you do for God, but what God does for you—that’s the agenda for rejoicing.” – Luke 10:18-20 MSG

When the disciples woke up that day, they probably saw themselves as followers of Jesus. By the end of their ministry campaign, they were still followers of Jesus, but they saw themselves as co-laborers as well. They saw differently because someone helped them see differently. That someone was Jesus, but it was more than Jesus – it was also the Spirit at work in and through Jesus. How we see ourselves, others, and the world around us makes an incredible difference in the experience of our lives.

And what did Jesus see as the disciples saw things differently? He saw major shifts take place, transformation, empowerment to face evil and prevail. When we see ourselves through the Spirit’s lens, as incarnate beings filled with the same Spirit as Jesus, we find enormous strength to move forward.

When we take our eyes off of that reality, we are like Peter when he was invited to walk on water with Jesus but paid more attention to the wind and waves than the Spirit which was sustaining him. Jesus’ response to Peter as he lifted him up from the deep? Why did you lose faith? Why did you take your eyes off of the Power that was within you, sustaining you?

The Apostle Paul instructed Jesus followers in the ancient city of Philippi, drawing from his own experience of the power of seeing things differently, which is an act of will:

Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you’re on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute!

Don’t fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God’s wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It’s wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

Summing it all up, friends, I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies. – Philippians 4:4-9 MSG

Paul’s instruction speak both into what seeing with the lens of the Spirit of God can do for our lives and also gives us a big hint on how to do it. How do we develop and sustain this way of seeing that anchors us to the Divine, to life, to joy? Seeing has everything to do with being, and being who we are in Christ requires cultivation. We live in a world that – more than ever, I think – constantly demands our attention, offering more distraction than ever before. If we hope to see ourselves and the world differently, and thus engage it from a different foundation, we have to incorporate practices to help us stay grounded, tapping into our being, who we really are, and into the world that really is, which is different than the voices in the world might tell us about ourselves and the world itself.

Staying true to our Being requires intention of attention. The concept shows up throughout the Bible. The Psalmist’s prose:

I bless the LORD, who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.
I keep the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.
For you do not give me up to the grave (Sheol)
or let your faithful one see only darkness (the Pit).
You show me the path of life.
In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. – Psalm 16:7-11 NRSVue

Jesus, who is well known for realizing his intention of attention, offered this to his disciples:

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. – John 15:4-11 NRSVue

The Apostle Paul wrote to a very distracted community of people about what happens when we cultivate our seeing by giving attention to our being. He used the metaphor of fruit, and hints that if we desire to see and be as the Spirit offers, it requires the discipline to let go of some things to make room for other, better things. The result? Fruit that every human being wants:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the self with its passions and its desires... If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit. Let's not become arrogant, make each other angry, or be jealous of each other. – Galatians 5:22-26 CEB

Of course, this cultivation is celebrated and instructed by all enduring religions. The Suffi Muslim poet, Rumi, said the profoundly obvious: "The quieter you become, the more you are able to hear." Gautama Buddha instructed, "Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without." Mother Teresa encouraged: "Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies." A very small thing that makes an enormous difference in our lives is what we do to foster our being, daily, so that we will see ourselves for who we really are – so much more than the labels we acquire – and engage our lives from a grounded, inspired place.

It sounds so simple that it must not be true. Yet it is. The reason Jesus rose early to ground himself in being, in Being, was because it made all the difference. Long before he looked at his phone, or turned on the news, or responded to always important, urgent emails, or began knocking out his to-do list which included running errands to Home Depot and Whole Foods – on opposite sides of town so he'd better get going – he invested time in reconnecting with Being. It is counter-intuitive, and my hunch is we blow

it off more often than we care to admit (and by “we” I include ME!). And yet it may be the most powerful and productive thing we codify in our calendars.

Martin Luther, the Catholic priest who protested against the corruption he saw in the tradition that formed him that led to the Protestant Reformation, once wrote that “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.” There is an old Zen Buddhist saying: “You should sit in meditation 20 minutes a day. Unless you are too busy; then you should meditate an hour a day. Gandhi quipped: “I have so much to accomplish today that I must meditate for two hours instead of just one.” Saint Francis chimed in: “Half an hour’s meditation each day is essential, except when you are busy. Then a full hour is needed.”

The life you have today is the life you have cultivated to this point. Your life going forward will depend in part on how you cultivate it. It is yours to do with as you please. The Spirit that was so at work in Jesus invites you to “Come! Follow me!” every moment of the day. That Way of life is a way of being and seeing that leads to the fruit of the Spirit, joy, peace, meaning, strength, and hope. Nobody is forcing you to do anything, yet the invitation remains on this summer day. Mary Oliver left us with so many insightful poems, not the least of which is titled Summer Day, but also known as The Grasshopper:

[The Summer Day](#)

by Mary Oliver

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
 the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
 the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
 who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
 who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don’t know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
 into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
 how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
 which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn’t everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

How about starting your day with the intention of grounding yourself in Being, reminding yourself of who you really are in Christ. Perhaps the Psalmist’s words might help (which you can remember throughout your day for bonus points):

Search me, O God, and *unveil* my heart;
examine me and *reveal* my anxious thoughts.
Point out anything in me that is *not in step with* you,
and lead me along the path of everlasting life. – Psalm 139:23-24 NLT