



TRANSFORMATION

LOVE BOLDLY · SERVE JOYFULLY
· LEAD COURAGEOUSLY ·

SERVE JOYFULLY -JOY OVERFLOWING-

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... what brings you joy? That is, when you're in your feels and you just need a pick-up, where do you turn? Do you dive into a pint of Haagen-Dazs and a RomCom? Maybe you go for a run or a walk in the woods? Perhaps you live under the law of "nothing beats a good nap." Ready, go!

OPENING PRAYER

**Compassionate God, fill us with your overflowing joy,
and may we serve others, such that they find that same joy.**

INTRODUCTION

Feeling accomplished, you continue your walk through the park. As you pass the less-than-helpful picnickers, those who only glared at the mother-in-need instead of rushing to her aid, you start to feel little sense of pride. But not because you feel you're better than they, but because

you've unlocked a secret to finding joy... serve others! It's so simple! And you wish every person here could learn that and feel the joy you're feeling. You find yourself near the parking lot where the woman is loading her toddler into his booster and the infant into the car seat. And you notice something. Her mood has changed. She's smiling, laughing, and getting her little ones to giggle, as well. And it hits you... one act of service brought joy in you, but also overflowed to her. Joy is contagious.

Setup Question: Who is the person in your life who exemplifies contagious joy? We all have one... when you're around them you can't help but walk away uplifted. What is it about them that makes their attitude and happiness so catching? Discuss!

SETUP

Today we wrap up the second of our three-week series. Hopefully, you're starting to get a fuller picture of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Whether you're a new Christian or have been doing this disciple thing for a while, it's good to occasionally assess, "am I doing what I'm supposed to be doing? What does it mean to be follower of Jesus?" Hopefully for you and for others, this has been and will be a summer of transformation. (Hence the name of the series.) To answer this question, we've been looking at the vision statement released by the United Methodist Council of Bishops last May. One more time... see if you have it memorized yet...

**The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who,
empowered by the Holy Spirit,
LOVE BOLDLY, SERVE JOYFULLY
AND LEAD COURAGEOUSLY
in local communities and worldwide connections.**

Jesus started with love, and so do we. But loving as boldly as Jesus did means more than just being nice. It requires sacrifice, commitment, loving God with all our being and maybe loving ourselves a little, too. Then, as we start the 2nd of the characteristics, we saw that bold love calls us to serve, specifically to take on the humble attitude of Christ. Then last week, we saw how service is more than simply begrudgingly helping others, if we serve from our gifts, we find joy in the service. Today, we'll look at one more aspect of serving joyfully, the thing that makes it all worth it.

Question 1: Last week's challenge was to serve others joyfully. How did you do with that this week? Were you able to take on the humble attitude of Christ and serve out of your gifts? Did it lead to joy? If you weren't able to live out this characteristic this week, why not? (No guilt, it's just good to assess so you can fix it.)

SCRIPTURE

So, that's a lot. You've got six weeks of marching orders swirling around in your head. So, today, we won't add to the "to do" list... just focus on *loving boldly* and *serving joyfully*. Instead, we're going to discuss one more aspect of serving that will hopefully motivate you to make this a primary part of your life. Today, we're going to talk about the *why*. To this point, the only reason we've discussed is... well, Jesus said so. Now, that should be enough, and it is. However, there's another reason that will hopefully encourage you to take this command seriously. To get at it, let's look at another story from Jesus's life. Here's you're set up...

Jesus has ruffled some feathers in the south of Israel, and so he decides to go back to home base, Capernaum, in the north. But to get there, he's got to go through Samaria. As we talked about a few weeks ago, Jews and Samaritans were bitter rivals. They weren't at war, they were both of

Hebrew descent. They just really didn't like each other, which makes this interaction all the more special.

Read John, chapter 4, verses 5 through 15.

Jews didn't interact with Samaritans, let alone a Jewish man and a Samaritan woman. But this day was different. Jesus knew there was an opportunity to serve here, one that could lead to transformation, not only in this woman's life, but in the entire region.

Question 2: Put yourself in the shoes of the Samaritan woman. How would you have felt? What would you have done, had you encountered Jesus in this context, not knowing who he was? Do you think you would have picked up on Jesus's metaphors, or would you have been stuck on the literal just as the woman was? Discuss!

At this point, the woman still doesn't get what Jesus is talking about. She thinks he's still talking about actual water, physical H₂O. But Jesus knows, that if he's going to transform this woman's life, he's got to take a different approach and get personal, dig into her life a little. So, he changes up...

Read John 4, chapter 4, verses 16 through 19.

Ah, now she's starting to get it! Jesus uses two tricks from our series. First, from last week, he uses his gifts to build a connection with her. He pulls out the "I'm Jesus, I just know stuff" move, and tells her something that he knows she knows he shouldn't know, ya know? (Yup, that checks out.) Second trick, from *loving boldly*, he sees her innate human worth, her value as a child of God. Having been married that many times and living with someone she isn't married to, she is most assuredly outcast.

It's likely she's just doing what she has to do to survive. And yet, Jesus sees her value as a child of God, and it ultimately changes her life.

Question 2: The "I'm Jesus, I just know stuff" gift is a powerful one. He uses it often to get right to the core, the pain, the insecurity someone is dealing with. Throughout Jesus's ministry, we see people who were drawn to him because of this unique gift of Jesus to identify that which needed healing in a person's life. If you were the Samaritan at the well that day, what would Jesus have asked you that would have gotten your attention? Where is the point of healing that Jesus would have touched on that would have proven to you he was the Messiah? (This can get personal and difficult, allow space for each other's stories.)

REFLECTION

Our Bishops gave us a description of each characteristic, and for serving joyfully, they said this...

"United Methodists, with a Christ-like heart, journey alongside the most vulnerable, offering care and compassion with joy."

We are called to journey with the vulnerable. This Samaritan woman was definitely a vulnerable individual. Jesus journeyed with her for an afternoon and it changed her life. He saw her worth, and connected with her by getting to the heart of her brokenness. In this sense, there isn't a person we meet who doesn't carry a similar brokenness. We may not all be as compromised as the woman at the well was, but every person you encounter has a brokenness that can draw them to a place of healing in Christ. In that way, every person you serve is a vulnerable person you can journey alongside.

But here's the kicker, (and finally), the *why*. Last week, we discussed how serving from our gifts can bring *us* joy. However, let's see how this act of service impacted the woman.

Read John 4, chapter 4, verses 26 through 30.

We can imagine this woman bounding away from the well, giddy, lifted by her encounter with Jesus. She tells everyone that she may have found the Messiah. A joyful act of service led to overflowing joy *in her*. Jesus exemplified the progression we've been talking about for the last 6 weeks. Out of bold love, he sees the innate worth of this woman. Despite her life, her past, her failures, her vulnerability, he sees her value. This calls him to serve. And so, he breaks out his gifts, proving he was the Messiah. And for a few minutes, he journeys alongside her. And what is the outcome? It built up an overflowing joy within her.

Joy is contagious. Sure, serving out of our gifts can build up joy within us. But, when we serve joyfully, it overflows to the people we are serving. Our joy brings them joy. And that is the *why*. That is the thing that should motivate you to take this command and characteristic seriously. Joy can be the transforming agent in a person's life.

Question 3: Consider your answer to the previous question, "what is the point of healing Jesus would have addressed with you?" Now, pause for a moment, allow for a few minutes of silence, and as God to place the name of someone on your heart who you know is in need of similar healing. After that period of meditation, think of one practical way you can joyfully serve that person... knowing that your overflowing joy might just lead to joy in them.

CLOSING

This characteristic came from the command of Jesus to serve each other, but also that our joy would overflow when we do. “I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!” (John 15:11 NLT) This contagious joy is what Jesus meant when he said our joy would overflow. Yes, he wants a rich, full joy for us, but he knew that when our joy overflows it spills out onto other people. He knew that joy would be contagious, and today’s story is the perfect example. The woman at the well gets hit with some Jesus joy, and she goes and tells everyone. And then *her* joy becomes contagious and spills out onto the people she tells. They see her transformation and go to see the person who had such a dramatic impact on this woman. We can only imagine the joy they felt, too.

Our world could use a little more joy. So, as we wrap up the second of our three series, Take this command and characteristic seriously. Serve joyfully, taking on the humble attitude of Christ, (as we talked about week 1,) using your gifts to bring joy back into your service, (as we talked about week 2,) and then spread that joy to others. You never know the transformation that could happen when you do.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations
and close in prayer.**