

Sermon ~ May 7, 2025

Synod Service and Dean's Ordination

Choose JOY

O Lord, take our minds and think with them. Take our ears and hear with them. Take our lips and speak with them. Take our hands and touch with them. Take our hearts and set them on fire. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Every year, I look forward to the biblical motto that Archbishop Anne prayerfully selects for us. And this year is no exception.

“With joy you will drink deeply from the fountain of salvation.” Isaiah 12:3 (New Living Translation)

Joy is the theme of our synod for 2025. We have come together this evening to worship God, and to witness the ordination of Dean Jobin-Bevans as a deacon in the Church.

We are in the season of Easter, and we have come together as a diocesan family to share in the good news of our salvation.

We have also come with many thoughts and hopes. Will my family and my parish be OK while I am gone? How will members of synod respond to my resolutions? Will I be able to sit still for the next two and a half days knowing that I don't feel very well? And decades of synods later, I continue to wonder if I brought the right clothes.

Transcending all of our real challenges, anxieties, worries, and concerns, is the gift of joy that comes from God. This is an evening of celebration. This is truly

*This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*  
Psalm 118:24

We are called to *Sing for joy* and in Psalm 66: 1-6

*Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth*

Some of my favourite songs are all about joy:

1. Joyful, joyful we adore thee
2. Rejoice the Lord is King

3. I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart, down in my heart to stay.

Living with joy doesn't mean that we play let's pretend we don't have any concerns or challenges or sadness. Living with joy means that we have the courage to acknowledge our brokenness and know that the joy that comes from God blesses us. We are heartbroken when our beloved family pet dies and yet we have joy at their unconditional love they gave us. We are very worried about drug overdoses and hungry people in our communities and yet we have joy as many people reach out to help. We are sad that our beloved parish can no longer afford a full-time incumbent and yet we have joy that so many lay people are showing leadership and grace. We are concerned about the tariffs and yet we have joy watching our beloved Canada come together in solidarity and in purpose.

Nearly 3 years ago, my husband Jouni (pronounced Yo-knee) had a severe stroke while we were walking the 800 km Camino de Santiago in Spain. Jouni's life forever changed and our life as a couple has forever changed. Every day since then, we choose joy and not despair. How are we doing? Some days it is really hard but we are trying. We couldn't choose joy without God. It is hard that Jouni can no longer run, drive a car, paint, cut his meat, do his favourite hobbies but we are blessed to have a great parking spot at the Cathedral and to be moved to the front of the security line at every airport.

I was devastated last month when I presided at a funeral for a 31 year old mother of 3 who had taken her life and yet I watched the joy on her family's faces knowing that she has her eternal life and that they will see her again. They have not given into despair but have chosen joy. In the midst of our tears, we sang and we prayed and yes, we laughed. Bishop Lydia Mamakwa laughed the heartiest.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, Nehemiah journeyed to Jerusalem and motivated people to rebuild the city walls in only 52 days. He was a man of faith, a man of prayer, and a man of obedience to God.

His worries were balanced by this reality that we read in Nehemiah 8:10:

***The joy of the Lord is our strength.***

Isn't that the truth? *The joy of the Lord is our strength.*

Jesus gave us this beautiful promise. It is from our gospel for this evening (John 6: 35-40)

*All who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.*

This promise is what gives us joy. Jesus wants us to be blessed with joy and to experience joy.

In his words,

*I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:11)*

Jesus is reaching out, in his farewell discourse, even though he knows he is heading toward his cross.

God wants to fill us with joy. The psalmist named it: Psalm 16:11, *in your presence there is fullness of joy.* and Paul named it in his letter to the Christians in Rome.

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.*

Romans 15:13

CS Lewis wrote an autobiography about his early life and his conversion to Christianity. The book is called **Surprised by Joy**.

In 1929, in his room at Magdalen College at Oxford, "I gave in and admitted that God was God and knelt and prayed." Now he was not yet a Christian at this point and he did not know about the Incarnation. However, he started going to church and became friends with the Dean of Divinity at Magdalen. In his book, he goes on to write these strong statements:

*I like clergymen as I liked bears, I had as little wish to be in the Church as in the Zoo.*

*Hymns were and are extremely disagreeable to me.*

*Of all the musical instruments I liked and like the organ least.*

Here is what CS Lewis wrote about his conversion to Christianity

That happened later while he was on his way to a zoo east of Oxford. The name of the zoo is Whipsnade and in his words,

*I know very well but hardly how the final step was taken. I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out, I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did.*

While CS Lewis rarely mentions joy in his book, the whole premise of his journey to be a Christian is underpinned by the foundation of joy. It is joy that reached out to him at every unexpected path in his journey, every conversation, every signpost. It is joy that carried him through his many books, including the **Chronicles of Narnia** and the **Screwtape Letters**.

Before I graduated from high school, I attended 8 schools in 4 countries. My father was an engineer and an executive with Kimberley-Clark and he was frequently transferred. One advantage I had was that I did the same speech in each new school. It was about the making of Kleenex and I gave out free samples of pocket packs to each student. Thanks Dad!

Like CS Lewis, my mother did not talk about joy. She lived it and as the Quaker saying goes, **Let your life speak**. She made the moves exciting and interesting for me and my 2 brothers. My mother Shirley had a deep faith and joy was the foundation of her life. She always looked for a church as soon as we arrived in a new destination as she knew that there she would find meaning and friendships. Dean, I believe that your mother Onalee lived the same way ~ a deep faith with the fullness of joy.

I first met Dean fifteen years ago when I interviewed him for the position of Music Director at St. Paul's. I remember how friendly he was and his enthusiasm for music, good music. In his 4 years with us, he was always open to trying new things. I thought it would be great to get the congregation singing more so Dean and I would teach the congregation rounds and sing them during the service. He would lead one side of the nave and I would lead the other. And the choir would be the third part of the round. In particular I remember **Jubilate Deo** which means *Be joyful in the Lord* from Psalm 100.

Dean, may your journey as a deacon in God's church be a special ministry of servanthood. May you always be ready to serve others, all those in need. May you, like the first deacon Stephen, be filled with grace and with power. May the fruits of the Holy Spirit, especially joy, be yours.

The apostle Paul doesn't give us a choice. In his letter to Christians in Philippi, he commands us this way:

Philippians 4:4

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice*

In 2015, the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu met together for a week and their conversation came together in a glorious book called, **The Book of Joy**. They discussed why they are joyful in the midst of many hardships. Archbishop Tutu said this: *The joy that you are talking about is not just a feeling. It is a way of life.* I agree. Joy is an available choice to each and every one of us right now and is not dependent upon our circumstances. Here is another quote from the book: *The path to joy does not lead away from suffering and adversity but through it.* The Dalai Lama has been exiled from Tibet for decades and yet he is very joyful.

Edith Eva Eger is a Czech Holocaust survivor and a psychologist. Here is a story she has told that I can't stop thinking about.

*She visited 2 soldiers on the same day. Both were paraplegics who had lost the use of their legs in combat. They had the same diagnosis and the same prognosis. The first veteran, Tom, was lying on his bed knotted into a fetal position railing against life and decrying his fate. The second, Chuck, was out of bed in his wheelchair, explaining that he felt as if he had been given a second chance in life. As he was wheeled through the garden, he had realized that he was closer to the flowers and could look right into his children's eyes.*

Choosing joy is about changing our perspective. It is about humility and humour and forgiveness and gratitude and compassion.

Pope Francis said this: *Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day.*

In Moses farewell speech given to the Israelites on the plains of Moab before his death, Moses commands the people in the same way. He tells them that they have a choice.

*I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.*

This evening, we also have a choice. We have set before us, joy and despair. Choose joy so that we will drink deeply from the fountain of salvation.

Choose joy so that, in the words of Isaiah, we shall go out in joy. (Isaiah 55:1

Choose joy so that we acknowledge the joy of Christ within each of us.

Choose joy so that we may live.      Amen.