

Isaiah 35
Happiness is Good, Joy is Better!
WRCoB 12.11.22

From NPR Radio, Monday, December 5, 2022

It's mindlessly binge-watching television without worrying about the time. It's eating snacks in bed without a care about leftover crumbs. And it's wearing the same pair of pajamas all week while working from home. Welcome to "goblin mode."

The slang term is defined as a "type of behavior which is unapologetically self-indulgent, lazy, slovenly, or greedy, typically in a way that rejects social norms or expectations."

This year, Oxford Languages, the creator of the Oxford English Dictionary, titled "goblin mode" as the 2022 [Word of the Year](#), meaning it best reflected the ethos and mood of the past 12 months.

Wow, I not sure what to think of that!

I mean, I understand the need to occasionally veg-out.

But I am not sure I like the idea that our whole year
Can be characterized by the term, "goblin mode".

Is this the kind of thing that makes us happy these days?

I know it's been a tough three years
Filled with sickness, grief, fear, anxiety and depression.

These have not been happy years.

The question is, could they have been joyful years?

There is a difference between happiness and joy.

I use an illustration from David Brooks.

He was speaking before a crowd of 35,000
At the graduation ceremony Arizona State.

He sensed two emotions in that stadium.

The first emotion, Brooks said, was happiness.

He saw it on the faces of the graduates
Celebrating their successful achievement.

The other emotion was farther up in the stands.

It was the emotion of joy by parents and loved ones.

Brooks writes

Happiness usually involves a victory for the self. Joy tends to involve the transcendence of self.

Happiness comes from accomplishments. Joy comes when your heart is in another.

The core point is that happiness is good, but joy is better.

I would say that happiness comes from outside of self.

Whereas, joy comes from deep within one's soul.

Happiness is external, joy is internal and eternal.

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Today we lit the Advent Candles of Hope, Peace, and Joy

Today, we focus on joy.

Our Scripture Lesson is a poem by the prophet Isaiah.

The imagery is of restoration and redemption
For those remnant believers
Who still hold to God's promises.

From a New Testament perspective
Isaiah's poem is a vision of the peaceable kingdom.

When Jesus Christ returns to establish heaven on earth.

In this kingdom to come
God restores not only people but all of creation.

What was a desert is now a flowering garden
Filled with blooming crocuses.

The eyes of the blind will be opened
The ears of the deaf will hear
The lame will leap
And the mute will shout for joy

There is a highway through it called the Holy Way

The redeemed walk on it and nothing harms them.

They will enter Zion, the New Jerusalem

**Isaiah 35:10 with singing,
with everlasting joy upon their heads.
Happiness and joy will overwhelm them;
grief and groaning will flee away.**

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Happiness and joy will overwhelm them.

Two emotions we long for.

Frederick Buechner describes happiness
As something human-made.

A happy home, a happy marriage, a happy relationship with our friends and within our jobs.

These are things that we work hard to develop.

But much of this happiness is derived from external things.

We live lives in pursuit of happiness.

But as David Brooks says
"happiness is good, joy is better".

Happiness we can take credit for
We've work hard for it.

We cannot, however take credit for moments of joy.

They just happen, serendipitously.

Joy comes where and when it will without warning

Sometimes they are fleeting experiences.

But they impact and influence our lives
For a deeper and more lasting way.

Buechner says joy is all encompassing.

Joy is where the whole being is pointed in one direction, and it is something that by its nature a [person] never hoards but always wants to share.

The second thing is that joy is a mystery because it can happen anywhere, anytime, even under the most unpromising circumstances, even in the midst of suffering, with tears in its eyes.

Even nailed to a tree.

When you have known joy
You have known God.

Even in the midst of wahala one can experience joy.

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I don't have to say we live in a world
Far removed from the Creator's intention.

We have known heartbreak, tragedy, and loss.

We have known fear, anxiety and depression.

We have experienced war within our own life span.

The NYT estimated that in the last 3,400 years
There has been only 268 years of peace.

Not 268 unbroken years of peace
But the total number of years within those 3400 year

Our world is not what God had intended.

The well-known British author, Thomas Hardy
Wrote a poem nearly a hundred years ago
That still is relevant today

Christmas 1924

*"Peace on earth!" was said. We sing it,
And pay a million priests to bring it.
After two thousand years of mass
We've got as far as poison-gas.*

But in these moments of joy
Or as Susan Robertson says, these God-moments
We catch glimpses of the Kingdom.

Sometimes when we least expect it.

They come crashing in unannounced.

The experience of joy in the birth of a child.

The wedding vows in a marriage ceremony?

A walk in a snowy wood.

All can bring a deep joy which is unexplainable.

Or how about the moment, you felt the Holy Spirit
Singing songs around a campfire

Or an altar call, when with the deepest conviction
You claimed Jesus as your own.

We catch glimpses into the way God meant life to be.

In those brief hints we experience overwhelming joy.

It is what we long for and search for.

Like St Augustine

Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Thee.

Isaiah's poem conveys this.

That a time is coming when we can . . .

**Isaiah 35:4 say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong,
do not fear; your God will come . . .**

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We live in the space between two Advents.

The first Advent is the coming of Jesus
In the form of a babe born in a manger.

His birth, life, ministry, his death and resurrection
Point to a new beginning.

God is doing something new
By coming into our world to show us
The way, the truth and the life.

And those who follow, continue the work of Jesus
By proclaiming Christ
And doing acts of peace and justice.

The second Advent is when Jesus returns
In what time or place or form, we don't know

But he comes to complete the work he started.

The new world will replace the old one.

The new world God intended.

This is the time we live in the
Now and not yet.

This is what we catch a glimpse of
In these moments of joy.

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The author of Hebrews describes it this way.

Hebrews 11:13-16 NLT

¹³ All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it.

They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth. ¹⁴ Obviously people who say such things are

looking forward to a country they can call their own. ¹⁵ If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back.

¹⁶ But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

This word, “longed for”
is rooted in the word long
As in length of time and space.

There is in all of us this sense of longing
For something a long way off

Something that when we get there, we know we belong.

We long for and wait for and anticipate a time
When life becomes how God meant life to be.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 CEB

¹¹ [God] has placed eternity in [our] hearts, without enabling [us] to discover what God has done from beginning to end.

This sense of God’s kingdom is in our DNA.

When we catch a glimpse of it
We experience an overwhelming joy
The world cannot give nor take away.

This is where joy comes from.

Deep down into our souls
Where we can get a glimpse of eternity.

Joy cannot be self-generated like happiness.

The moment of joy can be fleeting
But its memories linger on for a long time.

Advent reminds us of this overwhelming joy
Given through Jesus Christ and God's Holy Spirit.

And Advent anticipates the complete and full restoration
That accompanies God's return.

For we are the redeemed
Walking on the Highway called Holy Way.

We have experienced the love of God
And know of God's redeeming graces.

And though sometimes it feels like
We muddle through this life

Since we have experienced this overwhelming joy
We know and see our destination far off.

We might be tempted to live in "goblin mode".

But I assure you
You will never experience this overwhelming joy

Happiness is good!
But joy is better!