

4 year old Jude is talking with his Grandma:

“Is Grandpa in Kevin?” “Why, yes, Jude. Grandpa is in heaven.”

“Will you be in ‘Kevin’ with him too?”

“Yes, Jude, some day I too hope to be with Grandpa in heaven.” “Will I be in Kevin?”

“Yes, Jude, some day all of us will be together in God’s heaven. Jesus tells us in the Bible that he will bring us unto him. “Where I am, you will be too.-- Peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not be afraid.” (John 14:27)

This is a true conversation that took place last week between my friend Deanna and her grandson Jude. His grandpa died last month and young Jude was trying to understand and needed reassurance from his grandma. She put her arms around him and they had a prayer--& some of her home-made cookies.

In the scriptures today, John 17:6-19, Jesus prays for us ---and we, like Jude feel assured and comforted. In this time of isolation & anxiety, this is exactly what we all need. --to know God’s comfort & presence in our daily lives.

READ the scripture page JOHN 17:6-19 Here, Jesus prays for us, his followers, to be one, unified with God in Christ, and with each other. **He prays that we will have joy**; and he asks that God will protect us as we are sent out into an often unwelcoming and chaotic world.

The thing about Jesus and joy is that Jesus always wants us to have it in great abundance, like an overflowing fountain with fresh life-giving water in a barren desert. As Christians, we trust the prayer that Jesus prays for us all. It is a prayer that offers us hope and strength, even in the challenging times, but not as a simple fix. **Love, Grace and Joy are intertwined**—linked together. However, it is not cheap joy and cheap grace that we grant to ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without the needed repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Bonhoeffer puts it this way: “Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate”. Grace and joy are not the opposite of sorrow and pain. Often they are just opposite sides of the coin of life.

So often **giving thanks is a sure way to cultivate joy**. The daily practice of giving thanks—each day write down, or simply say 3 things you are thankful for. When we actively practice gratitude we bring joy into our lives. It is a sure way to bridge the gap between our pain and heartache and deep abiding JOY.

So —**what gives you JOY?** For Mother’s Day, Bill took me to go bird-watching at Rondeau. Son Bill & Angela met us in the great outdoors and we tracked down the spring warblers. Angie on her cell phone, captured a most beautiful yellow warbler. Oh, the beauty of God’s creation! Then Bill got take out at OJ & Molly’s—perch sandwich & salad. He had a steak sandwich. I guess we too, are like Jude—we need the comfort of God’s presence —& the contented feeling of physical sustenance in our human lives—the basics of food, shelter & potable water.

And we too like Jude & his Grandma **give thanks for all the ways God blesses us each day**. Recently, I read a reflection by Leland Collins. He quotes from Isaiah: “The Lord says, “**Do not fear, for I am with you.**” And begins his story: “One day I was in the kitchen when suddenly I heard my young dog barking in another room. When I went to see what was going on, I found him staring at a “Happy Birthday” balloon attached to a vase of flowers on the table. The balloon was moving only slightly but enough to distress him. Something that I knew to be quite harmless had created much anxiety in him.

So it often is with situations we do not fully understand.

When I was a teenager, my father's heart attack loomed before me, filling me with the fear that he might die. Many years later, my own heart attack filled me with similar apprehension about the future. Was I going to live? Would I be able to continue to work? What about my family?

I found great assurance in my faith and in God's word and presence. The message in Isaiah is one of comfort given to the beleaguered Jewish exiles in Babylon. God assured them that he was with them still and working out all things for their ultimate good.

It is good to know that whatever our fearful situations—illness, loss of a job, financial struggles, the covid virus --all are opportunities to remember God's love for us and to receive God's grace and courage to move forward in faith on life's journey.

Our prayer: Life-giving God, we know you help us conquer fear and give us courage to face any trouble. We know and trust that you will see us through.

You do give us deep & lasting comfort & joy. We give our thanks! Amen!

The Merry Heart:

1. **From a child's perspective, an explanation of God & Jesus:** "Jesus' Dad (God) appreciated all Jesus had done on earth and told him he didn't need to go out on the road anymore. He could stay in heaven. So he did. And now he helps his Dad by listening to our prayers and seeing things which are important for God to take care of and which ones he can take care of himself without having to bother God. Like a secretary—only more important.

2. Happiness keeps you sweet, trials keep you strong, sorrows keep you human, failure keeps you humble, success keeps you glowing—but only friends keep you going!!

3. What was the choice of vehicle among the apostles? A Honda--because they were all with one Accord.

4. This actually appeared in a church bulletin:

"The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon."

A message from the desk of Andy Harrington, the executive director for Foodgrains Bank:

As the Book of Hebrews says: "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us". At Foodgrains, we recognize that **perseverance is the key** to our vision of a world without hunger. We are please to see that our 5-year program, Conservation Agriculture, has added up to widespread community change. New farming techniques that emphasize minimal soil disturbance, soil cover and crop rotation have improved the land's production.

I thank everyone for their support & generosity for standing with people facing hunger around the world during these turbulent times. I continue to be profoundly grateful for running this marathon along with you."

From James Taylor:

"By breathing, we become immortal. A thousand years from now, if humans still exist, the air they breathe will have been modified by the air that you and I breathe today. The air every other creature on earth breathes is shaped, influenced, by the way I use that air. By my own exhalations and by the exhalations of human creations - our cars, our industries, our forests.

I take a deep breath. I am one with the world."

God be with you. Have a good week. Be at Peace.

Shalom, Annalee

