



DAY 20

Friday, December 21

(Candle of Joy)

JOHN 16:22

“Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”

The Unforbidden Fruit

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My sister used to play the Andy Williams record over and over. His voice would melodically croon, “It’s the happiest seeeeeeeason of aaaaaaaaall!” And how could one not feel it to be so after absorbing the sugar of countless Christmas cookies with red and green confections in the icing?

I would long to be pierced to the core by joy during these special times around the holidays. My siblings and I would refer to these fleeting experiences as “wonder,” but I think we meant and craved something akin to what C.S. Lewis termed “joy.” And we discovered that these moments of fulfillment could not be manufactured. In fact, the more that they were sought, the more they seemed to flee from our grasp. Sitting in the rocking chair, gazing at the throbbing lights on the newly-trimmed tree, I longed for something more; and I hoped this unnamed something would make me happy longer than a sugar high.

As I got older, seasons like Christmas became particularly painful when I wasn’t happy. The lawn ornaments and merry revelers were an in-your-face reminder that I wasn’t getting what I wanted for Christmas, which I guess was just to be okay.

While shopping in Downtown Crossing this week, I kept alert so as not to be mauled by the collective mad rush of other shoppers. The “joyful” stampede swelled in a frightful frenzy over something, maybe a quest for happiness via gifts, celebrations, and general holiday cheer. The stressed-out crowds must have been hoping to attain something in the end, or else why go through all that trouble?

In a recent article on Scriptorium Daily, J.P. Moreland critiques the modern notion of happiness, advocating instead the more abiding sense of well-being espoused by Jesus, the ancients, and not-so-distant generations. Moreland writes, “Americans are preoccupied with being happy, especially during

the Christmas holiday season. This creates false expectations and can easily lead to depression.” The good life is a life of happiness, or, in other words, “pleasurable satisfaction.” Yet such a life is hard to sustain for even a day.

But there’s an alternative to the roller coaster. “The act of coming to Jesus goes beyond receiving forgiveness. It also includes accepting and living out the claim that the kingdom of God, the direct availability of God Himself and His rule, is now available to anyone who will enter it through trust in Jesus.” Moreland then states that this entrance ushers in a new sort of life, rife with the fruits of the Spirit—among which is joy. And we know that fruit is a consistent mark of the nature of a thing, not an occasional freak side effect.

Accepting the “direct availability of God Himself” through Christ has made all the difference. Even when I am not experiencing “pleasurable satisfaction” or am downright miserable, the presence of God is a fountain of renewal and a source of life. In every moment, there is God (whether I sense Him or not); therefore, in every moment, there is possibility, wonder, and yes, joy. So joy again and again; re-joy; rejoice!

RESPOND:

DO: Thank the people in your life who love you consistently through the good times and bad. How are they a reflection of the joy of God’s renewing presence?

PRAY: Lord, we thank you that you died and rose and sent the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, so that you will be with us always. You are our source of joy that no one can take away. For who can separate us from the love of God?