

Joy (Part Two)

“Rejoice in the Lord always”

Reflection 22 in the series “A New World in the Morning”

So there are Paul and Silas in a strange town. They know almost no one, certainly no one with connections. They’ve just been caned – beaten with rods. They’re thrown into jail, into an inner cell, dark, dank, musty, with the smell of body odor and urine. Their feet are fastened in stocks. And at midnight they’re praying and singing hymns to God. Where do they find this inner joy? Where do they find this inner joy to sing songs in the pitch blackness of a prison at midnight? Where do we find this joy?

It all comes down to seeing the world as Paul and Silas saw it – a world lit by resurrection and open to the spirit of God, an enchanted and enchanting world surrounded by grace, filled already with eternity, their own lives now filled to the measure of all the fullness of God, deeply aware of how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, the divine flow all around them and within them, even when persecuted, even in jail around midnight. I am reminded of what Jesus was saying in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 when he spoke of the poor in spirit and of others as “blessed.” Do you remember what he was saying? How joyful, how radiantly joyful, how radiantly, unshakably joyful such people are. No one will be able to take away their joy (John 16:22).

How blissful such people are! In their very poverty of spirit, in their grieving, in their unanticipated meekness, in their passion for just doing what is right regardless of the consequences to themselves, in their mercy, in their single-mindedness pursuit of God, in their renouncing violence and making peace, in all circumstances, even persecution, it is they who have found unshakable joy. It is they who sense eternity all around them. It is they who live enchanted lives. Not needing to possess or control anything, all things are theirs. They are open to all that life offers them, trusting that no matter what happens in their lives, it may just be for their highest good. Deep in their souls it is they who are born again. It is they who are free. God’s love pours into them; joy and vitality pour out of them. It is they who feel one with God, who sense the divine flow all around them and in them. They are surrounded by grace. For them time becomes eternity. They are filled with previously unimaginable power. They feel they can touch the heavens; that kingdom is theirs. They have found a joy that is nothing short of euphoria. And even when they slip – and they will sometimes slip – they now know life in the Spirit and the way back to it.

At first you try a little, a little poverty of spirit, a little purity of heart. You let go of your narrow, fearful, little ego. Maybe you’re hurt, deeply disappointed. You’ve hit what feels like bottom. And for a moment you just let go and trust. And it is just then that you sense this deeper life, how free you could be, how good life could be. And it’s almost something like euphoria, a state you have never quite felt before. In that moment you realize that out there just beyond doubt and fear and grief is unshakable joy. But the moment leaves you. At first such moments do. They come and go. But now just maybe you can see the bliss, the deep soul happiness, that the God who is Love intends for you.

And it is this that we offer to everyone we know whoever they are and whatever they have done,

however wrong they may feel themselves to be: a way back to God, a way back to joy. Away from the strange, haunting sadness that afflicts so many. Away from the anguish that has entered the modern soul. Back to enchanted time and space, a world surrounded by grace and eternity, the divine flow all around us and in us, our own lives emptied of self and now filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Back to what Paul and Silas had that night – the faith to sing songs in the pitch blackness of a prison at midnight. Back to the life you've always wanted, life lived vibrantly and expectantly, increasingly fearlessly. Back to the sheer joy of being alive and alive forever.

Back to joy, that deep smile in the soul that tells us all is well and all shall be well whatever we face.

– Dale Pauls