**“Untranslatable Joy”**

**Mark 16: 1-8 – The Resurrection of Jesus**

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16When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. 2And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3They had been saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ 4When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. 5As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 6But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 7But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.’ 8So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Have you ever heard someone say, “I love my grandbaby so much, I could just pinch him?”

Gigil (nugil) is a word in the Philippine Tagalog language that describes the irresistible urge to pinch or squeeze someone because they are so loved and cherished… there's no equivalent word in English that describes that emotion. 

Maybe you love walking in the wind or even against the wind. It makes you feel alive and renewed. In other words, you feel uitwaaien (out-vi-en), a Dutch word which describes this specific experience. Again, there's no single English word to describe that.

Words like these are the special focus of Tim Lomas at the University of East London. Lomas has discovered there are many emotion-describing words from cultures around the world that have no corresponding word in English.

For example, have you ever felt a little mbuki-mvuki  (em-boo-key/em-voo-key)-- the irresistible urge to "shed your clothes and dance naked with joy”? It's a word from the Bantu language.

Or how about feeling kilig (ki-league)-- another Tagalog word describing the jittery, fluttering feeling one experiences as they talk to someone to whom they’re particularly attracted?

Lomas' "Positive Lexicography Project" aims to capture the many flavors of good emotions, as well as some that reflect bittersweet emotions, found across the world. Lomas explains, "In our stream of consciousness -- that wash of different sensations, feelings and emotions -- there's so much to process that a lot passes us by.

The feelings we have learned to recognize and label are the ones we notice, but there are a lot more feelings we experience of which we may not be aware. Lomas concludes, "I think if we are given these new words, they can help us articulate whole areas of experience we've only dimly noticed."

What word or words do we use to describe our state of being when we think about the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Easter is a *unique* moment, a *unique* experience that evokes *deep* emotions. Did you catch the "emotion/feeling" words in the scripture just read from the Gospel of Mark?

When the Sabbath was over, on the day we now call Easter Sunday, three women went to the tomb and found it empty.

They see a young man dressed in a white robe and they were at first *alarmed*, and then fled in *terror* and *amazement* and told no one about the experience because they were *afraid*.

Alarm! Terror! Amazement! Fear! Do we need even more emotion words to describe what the women felt that morning!?

Lisa Feldman Barrett at Northeastern University says, *“Yes, we do.”*

Her research shows that our ability to identify and label our emotions can have far-reaching effects. She points out that some people use different emotion words interchangeably, while others are highly precise in their descriptions of how they are feeling. "Some people use words like anxious, afraid, angry, disgusted to refer to a general affective state of feeling bad," Feldman explains. "For them, they are synonyms, whereas for other people they are distinctive feelings with distinctive actions associated with them."

Feldman argues that being able to make those distinctions in our feelings helps determine how well we cope with life.

As an example, she says that if we can pin down whether we are feeling despair or anxiety, rather than just saying we *feel bad,* we might be better able to decide how to deal with those feelings in ways that are productive and not destructive. We might decide to talk to a friend, watch a funny film, or do something else.

In the case of the women at the tomb, and the disciples who all had deserted Jesus, whatever they were feeling was soon replaced by untranslatable joy when they realized the truth: that Jesus, who had died, was alive again!

Since we're talking about precision in the emotion words we use, was their new feeling happiness or was it joy? Is the difference between those two words just splitting hairs? I don’t think so.

When you read the Bible carefully, you begin to understand that joy in the biblical sense is something different from happiness.

First, joy is not dependent on fluctuating emotions or circumstances.

Joy is a condition…a *contentment of spirit.*

It's quite telling that one of the occasions when Jesus spoke about joy was at what he knew was his last supper with his disciples. I sincerely doubt Jesus was feeling any happiness at that point.

But in the Gospel of John (15:11) Jesus talked to his disciples about *abiding* in his love and loving one another, and then added, "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).

One of my favorite authors, C. S. Lewis, who held academic positions at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities, was also a Christian apologist and best known for his children's classic series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. C. S. Lewis can help us think about the nature of joy.   
  
Lewis was a brilliant thinker and as a young man, he was an atheist. But one time, he was surprised by a deep, inner sensation that he could only describe as *pure joy*. Lewis said the *deep, inner* sensation he described as *joy* didn't last long, but it was so compelling that he spent a lot of time *trying* to experience it again.

Years later, he would title his autobiography Surprised by Joy.  
In searching for that deep, inner sensation Lewis described as joy, he found himself on the road to God and he eventually became a deeply committed Christian. Lewis searched for joy…what he found was God.  
  
On Easter, we would normally be gathered in our sanctuary and we likely think we have down pat what the expected emotions should be on this holiest day of the Christian year.

The first Sunday of Lent, before we entered the reality of Covid-19, we put the alleluias in a box and have kept them in that box until just a few minutes ago when Jennie let them out during the Children’s Sermon and then we heard our choir sing the awe-inspiring *Hallelujah* from Beethoven’s *Mount of Olives.*

As you sit in your living room or den or bedroom or wherever you are watching this service, your personal feelings are likely driven more by what is going on in your lives at this moment…

not by this annual celebration of and witness to the resurrection of Christ over 2,000 years ago, no matter how beautiful the music or how many times we sing alleluia.

What does Easter joy have to say to each one of us, particularly this Easter Sunday which is unlike any we have ever experienced?

Easter joy reminds us that however we feel this day, it's not the default emotion of the Christian life. The joy of Christ's victory over sin and death for us who follow him is the ultimate emotion, even if we're experiencing aren’t experiencing much joy at this moment.

Several years ago, Sister Miriam Therese Winter, a nun with the Medical Mission Sisters, wrote a song that gets at this level of joy, the deep sense of contentment that Jesus had…that deep, inner sensation that drove C. S. Lewis to seek the author of joy. It's called "Joy Is Like the Rain."

She starts by saying she saw raindrops on her window, which reminded her that:

Joy is like the rain. Laughter runs across my pain,

Slips away and comes again. Joy is like the rain.

Next, she observed clouds upon a mountain:

Joy is also like a cloud: Sometimes silver, sometimes gray

Always sun not far away. Joy is like a cloud.

She continued:

Joy is tried by storm. I saw Christ in wind and thunder

Whipped by wind, yet still afloat. Joy is tried by storm.

Finally:

Joy is like the river. Bit by bit the river grows

Till all at once it overflows. Joy is like the river.

Do we need to find a new word for the joy that should perk along as an undercurrent in the Christian life?

The writer G.K. Chesterton said he thought Jesus sometimes had to restrain himself from smiling and laughing out loud because Jesus knew Christianity's great secret…that the promise of the kingdom of heaven is true…but for Jesus to meet us where we are, Jesus had to restrain himself from breaking out in joy!

I don’t know why you tuned in to this Easter Sunday service. Maybe you wanted to be a part of this celebration. Last Sunday you waved, literally or metaphorically, some kind of branches as Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

You gathered at a table on Maundy Thursday and ate and drank and remembered Christ’s last supper with his disciples before he went to the garden of Gethsemane and was betrayed and arrested. On Good Friday, you spent time thinking about Jesus dying a horribly painful death by crucifixion…taking upon himself not just your sins…but the sins of all.

Now you are celebrating that Jesus rose from dead, restoring the fractured relationship between creation and God and giving us the gift of life eternal…and you are truly grateful and you want to celebrate.

Maybe you tuned in today because “attending” Easter service is what your family does on Easter, even though you presently may be physically separate from your family and you want to tell that family, “I watched Easter service today.” You may not participate in another worship service for another year.

Whether you are in church every Sunday, once a month, occasionally,

or whether this is your first time participating in a worship service…

here, in the words of Episcopal priest, Barbara Brown Taylor from her book, *God in Pain*, is why what I feel today is something I truly can’t put into words…why what Jesus did on the day he was resurrected from the dead is *untranslatable joy*:

“Christianity is the only world religion that confesses a God who suffers. It is not a popular idea, even among Christians. We prefer a God who prevents suffering, only that is not the God we have. What the cross teaches us is that God’s power is not the power to force human choices and end human pain. It is, instead, the power to pick up the shattered pieces and make something holy out of them—not from a distance, but right close up.”

Friends, that is the untranslatable joy of Easter…we worship and believe in The One who suffered for us…the one who offered his joy to us that our joy may be complete.

Friends, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!