

2 Samuel 6:1-5,12b-19; Ephesians 1:3-14

If I said someone was on cloud nine, tickled pink, over the moon, walking on air, on top of the world, like a kid in a candy store, full of the joys of spring, or in seventh heaven, what emotion would you deduce that person was feeling?

Joy! Crazy wild happiness. I love that we have all these phrases - and there are plenty more - that describe feeling joyful. I love that we make all these attempts to define what it is to feel such strong emotion, and yet somehow none of them can quite capture it. And language is fascinating. I love how words can be so evocative, rich, persuasive and powerful. The language we use is a window into who we are, into who and what has formed us, into how we think and function. But language is only one tool, and it is by no means our only way of expressing emotion.

Here's another phrase: jumping for joy. Or how many of you, perhaps when you think nobody is looking, will punch the air, or do a little victory dance? It's easy to be shy about expressing ourselves, but sometimes we can't help but be demonstrative. Sometimes the emotions just come out and we want the world to know!

I love that in our first reading from 2nd Samuel, King David goes a bit wild. There is leaping and dancing and shouting, singing and music and food. It's a full on celebration. There is so much joy that it can't be contained. And what is the reason for all this joy? The ark of the Lord, after having been captured by enemies and taken away, is now finally being brought back to Jerusalem. God is being returned to God's people, and the only appropriate response is an outpouring of overwhelming joy and thanksgiving.

Now it may seem like a stretch to make this connection, but this is actually the same emotion we find in our reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. And don't worry, you are not the only one who got lost in Paul's effusive ramblings! He is an enthusiastic writer, and it's made worse by the fact that he is usually dictating to a scribe, so what we have written down are the words that are tumbling out of his mouth.

I have this image in my mind of Paul pacing back and forth, getting carried away in enthusiasm and falling down rabbit holes, thinking of one thing after another to say and barely stopping for breath in his excitement, with the poor scribe writing as fast as he can, punctuation and clear sentence structure going out the

window. In fact, in the original Greek, this entire passage is one single, complicated sentence.

But the overarching theme is again one of joy. Paul is falling over himself to try to express how blessed we are and how awesome our faith is. He is verbally dancing with all his might before God.

As a slight aside, it's worth noting that of course, this passage does contain language about being chosen - the idea of predestination, which is a complicated and thorny theological issue. However, I do want you to notice that there is absolutely no negative language here. There is no language about the 'other' who is not chosen. There is no language about damnation. There is no mention of anyone being denied all the joys Paul is describing. This passage is wholly positive. It is an effusive outpouring of why faith is a glorious thing to be celebrated.

In fact, Paul even exclaims that all things will be gathered up in Christ, things in heaven and on earth - and surely it makes sense that 'all things' includes all people.

So God's overarching plan for the universe, a plan centred in Christ, includes everyone being drawn into the wonder of God's salvific love.

But perhaps even more exciting, Paul actually gives us here the answer to the age-old question - what is the meaning of life, the universe, and everything? It isn't 42. Instead, it is this: that we might live for the praise of Christ's glory.

Just let that soak in for a minute. We have been destined, according to the purpose of God, to live for the praise of his glory.

What does that look like? How does that translate into your life?

Episcopalians aren't the most demonstrative denomination. We don't often put our hands in the air, and tend to prefer calm worship and liturgy. But doesn't being destined to live for praise sound joyful?

Now I know the word 'joy' might put some of you off. It can sound like an instruction to be happy all the time, and we know that isn't possible. Life isn't always happy, and it can't be forced. But joy is deeper. Joy comes

from a persistent contentment. Joy can stem from knowing what the meaning of life is. Joy is a side effect of being unconditionally loved. Joy is knowing that God delights in you being yourself, and that you play an important part in God's plan for the world.

Because each of us matters deeply. We all have something to contribute in the unfolding praise that stretches across the universe, and according to the Psalms even the stars join in with singing. We are part of a cosmic choir proclaiming the greatness of God! And really, if God is real (which we believe she is), isn't this the most natural reaction?

So how might you weave more praise into your life? For me it goes hand in hand with thankfulness. If noticing and giving thanks for all the small daily gifts becomes a habit, it helps to form that deep-seated sense of joy. A simple practice is to keep a notebook by the side of your bed, and at the end of each day, write three things you're thankful for. If you're less of a notebook person, just spend a minute thinking about it, maybe while you shower or brush your teeth! It might be hard some days, but the habit is worth forming. It helps tune you in to seeing small gifts that might otherwise go unnoticed.

So how do you express joy? What puts a spring in your step? David danced before the Lord with all his might, and Paul was so excited that he is hard to understand, but what we can take to heart is that the interaction between ourselves and God is something wondrous. It is something worth celebrating. And God is certainly worth praising.

Seek joy. It's one of the fruits of the Spirit that we can nurture into deeper flourishing. Seek it, and let it shine! May we be a people, and this a church, of joy, as we praise God's glory together.

Amen.