



Pastor's Corner

Dear Friends,

Joy has been a really important word in my life in the past handful of years. I was asked to give a presentation on Joy to the Presbyterian Women of Homestead Presbytery in 2022. I was asked several months in advance, and I could not know at that time how my life would come to be turned upside down. My mom was diagnosed with a glioblastoma (brain tumor) and given days to weeks to live. She immediately went on hospice. When it came time for my presentation I was in Iowa taking care of my mom, along with my sister. I stayed for as long as I could, drove back to Lincoln for the presentation, and then quickly drove back to be with mom. She died hours later.

While I definitely shed tears that day as I spoke of Joy to the Presbyterian Women (I know...that's a shocker, right?), I was comforted because I knew that even though I was grieving what was about to happen, I was at that very moment living the essence of what Joy is at its very core: a feeling of peace and even jubilation in the midst of difficult moments.

Gina Manskar, in collaboration with The Upper Room, shared some practices we can use to help cultivate joy in our lives, and I'd like to share them with you as I encourage you to commit to seek joy in your own lives:

Gaze on Christ

- Keep your eyes on Jesus. ("We must keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us and makes our faith complete" (Hebrews 12:2)). Look for glimpses of Christ in the world: he is here among us, helping us and giving us hope and joy.

Practice Gratitude

- Look for something for which to be grateful each day, no matter your circumstances.
- Give God thanks for these good things.

Allow the Unknown

- Even when you don't know what is ahead, allow uncertainty to exist, trusting in God's grace.
- Ask Christ to walk with you through the voids in your life.

Reframe Your Experiences

- Consider whether the difficulty you are experiencing or the suffering you are enduring might be a place of encounter with Christ, "*the light [who] shines in the darkness*" (John 1:5). Don't allow these circumstances to limit your experience of joy.

Keep Hope Alive

- If you feel your hope is fading, connect with others (a pastor, spouse, good friend, mental health professional).
- Seek out scripture that reminds you that you are God's beloved.
- Share both your positive and your difficult feelings with God in prayer.

Joy doesn't necessarily happen in an instant. It can take practice and self-awareness. It can take a complete reframing of how we see the world and God. I want joy to be the defining characteristic of my faith journey, and I invite you to join me in this endeavor. "*The joy of the Lord is my strength*" (Nehemiah 8:10).

Take good care, Kara

