

Good Sunday morning Church of the Apostles family,

As I sit down to write this I find myself a bit weary but feeling so grateful for the opportunity to have been able to spend most of the afternoon outside. After mowing our yard and the yards at Trinity UCC, Bruce and I decided to take our daily walk. We began walking on Rattlesnake Run and before long we found we had gone over 4 miles. I ended up with over 15,000 steps so far today. My problem is that I have sat down to write this and am afraid I won't be able to get up when I am done. It was glorious to be outdoors today. I do hope many of you were able to be outside soaking in this beautiful day. Just think, there will be many more just like it or even better. My hope is that you are all managing to find good and positive activities to fill your day with in spite of the "stay home" advisory.

One of the things I did this week was begin to read a new book. I had tried to hold off on starting this book since it may be a possibility for our Book Study Group. Since my recommended reading book for the Penn Central Conference has not come yet, I just couldn't help myself. I am so glad the other book hasn't come yet. It's almost like I was supposed to read this new book at this time. The book is *The Book of Joy* authored by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, with author, editor, and literary agent Douglas Abrams.

Even though I have just begun to dig into the book, I found myself looking ahead. And what I found I feel is worth sharing with you all to start the new week. There are many simple practices that the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu use daily that they call Joy Practices. The one I want to share with you all is entitled *Joy Meditation – The Eight Pillars*. This meditation is meant to smooth the ride on the bumpy road of life. It allows you to use the eight pillars and to use them when you encounter a problem, confront pain, or face suffering, whether these are major life challenges or daily dissatisfaction. The eight pillars are: Perspective, Humility, Humor, Acceptance, Forgiveness, Gratitude, Compassion, and Generosity. These eight pillars are the practices that lead to greater inner peace and greater joy. Even without reading what the book has to say about these eight pillars, this Joy Meditation can be done because the author "walks us through" each of the eight pillars. All that is needed is your willingness to try.

1. **Sit comfortably.** You can sit in a chair with your feet on the floor or cross-legged. Place your hands comfortably on your legs or on your lap.
2. **Take several deep breaths through your nose.** Let your body begin to relax. Reflect on each of the pillars, and notice as your body relaxes even more and your heart feels lighter.
3. **Let your problem come to mind.** Reflect on the situation, person, or challenge that is causing you pain or suffering.
4. **Perspective.** See yourself and your problem from a wider perspective. Try to step back from yourself and your problem. See yourself and your struggle as if you were watching a movie about your life. Now think about this problem from

the future, from a year or a decade from now. Recognize that your problem will pass. See how your problem shrinks as you see it in the wider context of your life.

5. **Humility.** Now see yourself as one of the seven billion people and your problem as part of the pain and suffering that so many human beings experience. You can see your problem as part of the unfolding and interdependent drama of life on our planet and even see yourself from space, or from a God's-eye perspective. See how deeply connected we are with one another. You are part of the flowering of the universe in your particular place and time. Your connection to others makes you much stronger and more capable of solving your problem. Let yourself feel love and appreciation for all of those who have contributed to who you are and who support you in your life.
6. **Humor.** Smile and see if you can chuckle at your problem, at your shortcomings, at your frailties. Try to find the humor in the situation and in your struggle. Even if it is a very grave or serious situation, there is often some humor that can be found. The human drama is often a comedy, and laughter is the saving grace. This ability to laugh allows us to accept life as it is, broken and imperfect, even as we aspire for a better life and a better world.
7. **Acceptance.** Accept that you are struggling and accept that you have human limitations. Remind yourself that these painful realities do happen to us, to those we love and in our world. Acknowledge that you cannot know all the factors that have led to this event. Accept that what has happened has already happened and that there is nothing you can do to change the past. Now remind yourself: "In order to make the most positive contribution to this situation, I must accept the reality of its existence."
8. **Forgiveness.** Place your hand on your heart and forgive yourself for any part you have played in creating this problem or this situation. Recognize that you are only human and that you will inevitably fall short of your aspirations. You will hurt and be hurt by others. See the shared humanity of any others who are involved and forgive them for their part and for their human limitations.
9. **Gratitude.** Think of three or more people or things that you are grateful for in this problem or your life right now. Can you find ways in which your problem is actually contributing to your life and growth? Are there people or things that are supporting you to face this challenge?
10. **Compassion.** Put your hand on your heart or place the palms of your hands together at your heart. Have compassion for yourself and for how you are struggling. Remember to take time to grow and learn. You are not meant to be perfect. Suffering is inevitable. It is part of the fabric of life. There are going to be frustrations in any life. The goal is to use them as something positive. Feel the light of loving-kindness shining from your heart throughout your body. Now send that compassion to your loved ones, to anyone you are struggling with, and out to all who are in need of love and compassion.

**11. Generosity.** Feel the deep generosity that is in your heart. Imagine yourself radiating this generosity of the spirit to all around you. How can you give your gifts? How can you transform your problem into an opportunity to give to others? When we give joy to others, we experience true joy ourselves.

Notice that four of the eight pillars are qualities of the mind: *perspective, humility, humor, and acceptance*. The other four are qualities of the heart: *forgiveness, gratitude, compassion, and generosity*. Sadly, many of the things that undermine our joy and happiness are created by us. Often it evolves from the negative tendencies of the mind, emotional reactivity, or from our inability to appreciate and utilize the resources that exist within us. Obstacles to Joy are: *fear, stress, anger, grief, illness, and death*. In the book we find that everyone seeks happiness, joyfulness, but from outside – from money, from power, from big car, from big house. Most people never pay much attention to the ultimate source of a happy life, which is inside, not outside. Even the source of physical health is inside, not outside. Like exercise, spiritual practices are not ends in themselves. They exist to support our mental health and mental immunity. The more we practice, the more we benefit. I do realize that the nature of contemplative life is that it is very personal, and not all practices will work for all people. My hope is that this Joy Meditation will inspire you during this unprecedented time in our world and could be a help as we await the time when we can start to slowly return to “a new normal.”

I continue to hold you all in prayer and hope that you know that if you feel I can be of any help to you during this time, please give me a call. Or if you just want to check in and chat, that would be most welcome. Plus don't forget you can watch Sunday morning worship services on Apostles website by “hitting” the word *Worship* at the top of the page, under the picture of the church. Until we can gather together again, stay well and soak up this amazing time of year when the earth re-awakens and gifts us with such beauty and wonder.

Blessings,

Pastor Narda