

Krista Tippett, host on the podcast *On Being*, often ends her interviews by asking her guest, "What makes you despair, and where are you finding joy?" While it's straightforward to point to the negatives. Tippett wrote, "[Joy] is a muscle, a promise, a choice to live open-eyed and wholehearted in the world as it is and not as we wish it to be."¹

Here we are. The election is as it is. How will we move forward? Press on?

Joy as a muscle and a practice reminds me of our stewardship verse from Philippians 3:14, "Press on toward the goal." I grew up playing sports, so this language resonates with me. If your team loses under the Friday night lights, work harder the following week. If you strike out, take extra batting practice the next day. Effort can be a hopeful thing; it keeps one from brooding. Move forward. Press on.

But I fear I'm starting to sound like a locker room halftime speech. Do we hear Paul the same way?

It is true that the Apostle repeats the exhortation to rejoice several times in his letter to the Philippians, always in the imperative mood in Greek, as indicated by an exclamation point in English. "Rejoice in the Lord, always! Again, I say rejoice!" A pep talk? Perhaps.

Yet joy is not something we accomplish or earn, not a matter of how hard we try. Paul held the belief that the source of joy stemmed from the victory already achieved by Christ Jesus, who rose from the dead to conquer death itself. God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. God did this for all of us.

While I like a good sports metaphor, the problem can lie not only in their potential to degenerate into pep talk, but also in their dependence on conquering opponents. There are winners and losers. This clearly applies to elections as well.

But since we believe that God has already won the victory, how can we make enemies of our fellow human beings, who are likewise created in God's image? God extends grace to the entire world.

Please don't misunderstand me as advocating moral relativism: Christians have the moral calling to advocate in the public sphere for the teachings of Christ. Otherwise, our words are wind and dust, and (as scripture reads), "the truth is not in us."

We are up against what Paul termed "powers and principalities," meaning systems of injustice and evil, and not people themselves. It's tempting to lose sight of that, tempting for all of us to badly characterize the other side, forgetting they, too, are created in God's image.

Paul despaired in this letter to the Philippians about a divided community of faith. Not everyone must agree all the time, but the Apostle was discouraged by Jesus Christ's followers' inability to form resilient relationships, which could stand testing. I share that deep concern. Why should the world listen to us if we cannot practice what we preach?

This fall, I've been taking a course with Jennifer Harvey, an antiracism and queer activist. Religious fundamentalism often entails a list of dos and don'ts, particularly regarding behavior. Harvey points out, however, that progressives are likewise prone to developing their own purity tests. Examples include vitriolic public arguments about cancel culture. Dismissing "those people" as "problematic" renders them unworthy of engagement.

Harvey asks, "What kind of culture do we want to grow?" Instead of calling people *out*, she suggests calling them *in*.² I've heard that wisdom before.

Our friend and former employee Nana Morelli frequently described Chapel in the Pines as a "landing place," a place for connection. As a landing place, we desire more than a triumph of one side over the other. A landing place, like Paul's prayer for peace, must "surpass our understanding" and contain our seemingly opposing realities in a creative tension: beauty and brokenness, ambiguity and conviction, forbearance and fierceness, power and frailty, despair and joy.

A landing place provides an opportunity to answer Tippett's question: What makes you despair, and where are you finding joy? Notice the key

difference not only between despair and joy, but “what” and “where” – *What* makes you despair, and *where* are you finding joy? I pray that one of those joyful landing places is here at Chapel in the Pines.

Rather than calling others out for ridicule, we are, however, called out into the world. A landing place must not paper over issues, nor turn away from the real needs in our community and the call to love our neighbors. With open-eyed, wholehearted hope for the world, the church may be a landing place to call people in and then a launching pad to send people out. Not a half-bad stewardship message! More importantly, both images are illustrated by the words of Jesus.

“Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden. And I will give you rest.”

“Go, therefore, and make disciples... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Called in and called out, Jesus commanded us to live a life of generosity instead of selfishness, and of humility instead of arrogance. He commanded us to share power with others instead of lording it over them, especially the most vulnerable. Jesus lived these commands in his own life, and Paul summarized the call for the church earlier in Philippians.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” Another stewardship message!

More poignantly, the clear charge is to enter the world with *compassion* rather than *coercion*. I thought hard about this particular pep talk: compassion, not coercion. But how will it work? How will compassion solve problems in a coercive world of selfishness, greed, and violence?

I don't know. That's the truth – I don't know how this will work at a time when people seem hell bent on destroying one another. I don't know, save Christ's promise to be with us. Save Christ's example of how he treated others. By showing compassion, we develop empathy; by empathetically

reaching out to others, we discover joy together. It may be that we don't need to know, save the knowledge that love leads us to learn.

Beloved, I have been grateful to spend this week at work, particularly to write, text, visit, and speak with many of you who have reached out. I've been grateful because you have shared your feelings, and feelings are myriad and not just limited to one single thing. And so, this week there has been no shortage of worry, but there has also been no shortage of laughter.

I'm especially grateful of these wide-ranging emotions because it has taught me again about of what can be so difficult about elections – not just the polarization, but also the generalization, the way people are often considered with such generic simplicity, made out to be incapable of holding contradiction at the heart of their lives. This week has reminded me of what can be wonderful, and difficult, and illuminating, and empowering, and challenging about the work of, well, working with people, broken, blessed, fragile, flawed, wild, and holy as we are – as we *all* are.

To be reminded of this complicated, often messy part of relationships the week after the election was not immediately the greatest feeling. It meant that I had to lean again into not knowing, which is, again, an act of love.

Even when I wasn't the best at being loving – for we all fall short, no matter the pep talks – I found more joy than I expected to.

I know joy's not always the point, but it's part of the point. I'm holding on to that, and likewise, trying to give it out. A landing place, a launching pad. Called in and called out. Compassion, not coercion. What gives you despair, where are you finding and giving joy? Oh, yes, beloved, the giving is full of love.

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¹ Krista Tippett's essay, [On Hope - Orion Magazine](#)

² See Jennifer Harvey, *Antiracism as Daily Practice*. More info here: [BOOKS — Jennifer Harvey](#)