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EVEN IF YOU DON’T GET YOUR TV SHOW

John 16:14-24

Early in my treatment for melanoma I experienced an odd side effect. I counted at one point and figured I had about 16 different side effects from the treatment. You’ve seen those commercials on television for various pharmaceutical drugs with the weird names like rexulti, xarelto or jublya, that include a prodigious list of side effects. I lived it with yervoy and opdivo although most of the side effects were minor almost to the point of being trivial. Yeah, I know, it only takes one bad one, especially if the side effect is death. What I learned is the drugs, all drugs, have effects. Some are ones the doctors want, and some they don’t intend. We call those side effects, but they are just what the drugs do and you can’t have one without the other. The particular effect that I mentioned was unique to me apparently, for I found no mention of it anywhere in the literature. When I told my doctors about it they basically said, “Uh, okay, if you say so.” They’d never encountered it before. That was not the only time I stumped them with a peculiar side effect that seemed to be uniquely mine.

Anyway, this unusual side effect was that my sense of smell improved significantly for a while. Due to a lifetime of chronic allergy and sinus problems, my olfactory abilities have degraded to the point that they border on useless. I have had 3 CT scans of my head in the last 15 months, and every one of the reports about them mentioned that I have signs of severe chronic sinusitis.

Laurie is at the opposite end of the olfactory spectrum from me. Her sense of smell is exceeded only by that of dogs. She smells everything. Often she will say, “Do you smell that?” And I will answer, “Smell what? I don’t smell anything.” For the first time in our life together I would say, “What is that smell?” and she would answer “What smell?” Unfortunately that side effect has faded. It was really nice to be able to smell stuff. Aromas can add wonderfully to our experience of life.

Smells are not always wonderful. For a brief time when I was in college I dated a girl who lived on a dairy farm about 10 miles from my college. Every time we went out I picked her up at her home in Chino and got a full whiff of Eau D’ Bovine, even with my substandard abilities. That was not a dreamy aroma. After she jilted me I told people whenever I smelled cow manure it made me think of her. I wasn’t bitter. Not at all. For me she was in the same category as the now Los Angeles Chargers who also jilted me and who also reek of Eau D’Bovine.

That obviously was not an especially pleasant odor or memory. But there are a number of aromas that evoke wonderful memories and feelings. Not far from our house in Bakersfield there was a bakery called Smith’s Bakery. This bakery has the best jelly doughnuts on the planet. They are what every other jelly doughnut wishes it was. When you walked into that bakery the aroma could make your mouth water. It was delicious. It was one of the most pleasant smells I’ve ever encountered. Sadly, the only other place I recall that has that same aroma was a bakery across the street from our grandparents’ apartment on Woodland Avenue in Cleveland. I’ve been to other donut shops and bakeries that have pleasant, similar aromas, but none quite like the one at Smith’s.

I’m talking about aromas because as followers of Jesus Christ we are to give off the aroma of Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 2:14 Paul wrote, “Thanks be to God, who always leads us in Christ’s triumphant procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.” That is a beautiful and powerful aroma. But what is it like? We will get a glimpse of one component of that aroma today as we look at John 16:14-24.

THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL GLORIFY JESUS

In verse 14 Jesus made the statement that one of the characteristics of the work of the Holy Spirit is that he glorifies Jesus. Jesus had said much the same thing in 15:26. “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.” This is one of the main aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12: 3 Paul wrote, “No one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit makes Jesus known and brings him glory.

That brings us back to 2 Corinthians 2:14 where Paul wrote that we are to “spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.” One of the things the Holy Spirit does is to produce in us the aroma of Christ. That aroma is not always welcomed. Paul went on in 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 to say, “We are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death, to the other an aroma that brings life.”

For some people the aroma of Christ smells of life and beauty, but to some it smells like death. That is not a good smell. My freshman year in college there was a guy who lived in my dorm who was one of the worst slobs I’ve ever seen. His room would have to have been upgraded significantly to reach the level of a pigsty. At one point it got unbearable because it smelled awful. It got so bad that a couple of guys worked out a plan to get in his room when he was gone and clean it up and try to get rid of the smell. What they discovered when they got in there was astounding. A possum had gotten into his room, crawled under his bed and had died. It had been there for several weeks. I can tell you that the smell of death is truly repulsive.

Paul warned that giving off the aroma of Christ will not always be popular. It certainly wasn’t for him. It earned him several beatings and arrests and lots of opposition and threats. Some people will sometimes react violently to Jesus. That happens for a number of reasons, but not the least of them is that Jesus represents a possible threat of judgment and condemnation to them. People hate to feel judged, hate to be condemned even more, and especially if they feel guilty.

In his book, *Ends And Means*, British writer Aldous Huxley admitted that he did not want a world with meaning, one with God as judge. He said he didn’t want that because, “a meaningless world frees me to pursue my own erotic and political desires.” In other words, if God exists he might have a moral standard that he would hold us to, and Huxley didn’t want any part of that. Thomas Nagel is a professor of philosophy at New York University. In a moment of revealing honesty he wrote, “I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God…It’s that I hope there is no God. I don’t want there to be a God.” It’s not hard to understand why the aroma of Christ would not be pleasant to those people.

Way too often Christians have given off an aroma that’s stinky because they stress all the wrong things. Instead of grace they smell of law and judgment, instead of love they smell of pride and rejection, and instead of peace and joy they smell of division and complaint. One aspect of the aroma of Christ is that one of its elements is joy.

THE DISCIPLES’ GRIEF WOULD TURN TO JOY

In verse 16 Jesus says something that sounds a bit like “now you see me, now you don’t.” Little kids love a game like that. We had Hunter, our 18 month old grandson, with us for a few days recently. At one point I held a pillow up in front of my face so he couldn’t see me. Then I popped up over the pillow and said, “Peekaboo.” He thought this was hilarious. I must have done that 10 times and every time he found it riotously funny.

Jesus said, “In a little while you will see me no more, and then a little while you will see me.” Maybe he’s going to say peekaboo. The disciples didn’t get it. They said, “What does he mean?” Jesus did not mean he was going to play peekaboo with them and they were going to find it hilarious. He wasn’t going to play hide and seek. He was going to die and be put into a tomb, so they wouldn’t see him anymore. But then he would come out of that tomb and they would see him when it was the last thing they expected to see.

He explained that soon they would weep and mourn while the world around them was rejoicing. They were on the verge of having their world blow up when Jesus was arrested, tortured and killed. I can’t even imagine the horror and the grief they experienced when they saw Jesus hanging on that cross. The world, represented by the leadership of Judea and Rome, would be glad he was gone. They thought they were done with him and since he was a troublemaker for them, in their eyes that was good. It was deeply sorrowful for Jesus’ followers. But Jesus said that their grief would turn to joy. He was referring to what would happen when he rose from the dead.

Jesus used the birth of a child as an analogy for what they were about to experience. Pregnancy has been a terribly difficult ordeal for all the women in my family. Laurie probably had it the easiest. Her pregnancies were no walk in the park. I am amazed at what women go through. I always lost weight when Laurie was pregnant because she often got sick right about time to cook dinner. Both Carissa and Anna were worse. Both spent time in the hospital during pregnancies because they were on the verge of a disastrously early delivery. Both felt awful. Carissa was sick the entire 9 months, Anna had terrible pain. Both of them have said they would like to have another child, but they can’t bear the thought of going through another pregnancy. Anna’s doctor told her she absolutely must not, that it would be dangerous for her.

“Johnny tell them what they’ve won for enduring this difficult ordeal of pregnancy.” Congratulations, you’ve won a bout of labor and delivery! Those who have gone through that say that there’s no pain like it. Laurie’s last delivery had to be a C-Section. We were a little uneasy when the doctor insisted that we schedule the delivery a week before the due date. He didn’t want Laurie going into labor, so we agreed. We approached that date secure in the knowledge that Laurie wouldn’t have to experience the pain of labor. And then a week before the scheduled operation, Laurie went into labor. We rushed to the hospital only to find that it was standing room only. There were no operating rooms available. They put us in a labor room to wait for an OR to open up. Laurie was in great pain. I mean serious stuff. She didn’t throw anything at me, but she let it be known that she didn’t appreciate my wise advice about the fact that she was doing labor wrong.

But then the baby is born and all that difficulty, the ordeal of pregnancy, the absurd pain of delivery, fades from view, eclipsed by the joy of the arrival of that baby. I have no words that fully express what happens when that baby arrives. Both of us found that our hearts were filled with a joy like nothing we had ever felt before. They just exploded with love and joy that was immense. The arrival of that child opened up a part of our hearts that we didn’t even know existed.

Jesus said that was what was about to happen to his disciples. They were going to experience a pain like nothing they’d ever been through before, but then he was going to come out of his tomb, fully alive, and they were going to have their hearts explode with a joy they had never known before, a joy like nothing else in this world. The worst grief ever would become the best joy ever.

We, of course, have not had the experience that Jesus’ disciples did. We have not gotten to follow Jesus around physically and be astounded by his power, wisdom, love and glory. We didn’t have to watch the horror of his crucifixion and be crushed by it. We didn’t get to have the astounding joy of seeing him after he defeated death, very much alive in the flesh. However, the effect of what has happened to us is similar. We have been given life from death. We have been given the promise of eternal life that nothing can take away. We have been through the sadness of knowing that something was missing in our lives, of being grieved by our own flaws and failings, and then been surprised by joy, as C. S. Lewis put it, when we found forgiveness, acceptance and love from God, when we were given new life and the hope of eternal life in God’s kingdom.

NOTHING CAN TAKE AWAY THAT JOY

At the end of verse 22 Jesus said, “No one will take away your joy.” Isn’t that a bit curious? Why would he say that? Who would want to take away someone else’s joy? That would have to be an extreme version of Ebenezer Scrooge, wouldn’t it? Bah, humbug indeed.

Jesus said that because it is the nature of life in this world. We have a saying, “All good things must come to an end.” Yeah, why is that? Why do all good things have to come to an end? One reason life is the way it is, with all good things ending, is that we have an enemy. Jesus alluded to this at the end of chapter 14. Satan despises joy. It makes him angry. God is the most joyful person in all existence. Satan is so hostile toward God that he hates everything that characterizes him. So Satan despises joy and tries to stamp it out wherever he sees it. Joy smacks of God, somSatan tries to eradicate it. His dream for you and me is that we would be utterly joyless, despondent people who feel sorry for ourselves, see nothing but negative and complain a lot. Satan wants us to pursue fleeting joys, because they quickly end and leave us frustrated, sad and confused, which is just what he wants. So don’t be surprised if when you experience joy it very quickly seems to be attacked or dissipates all too soon.

Another aspect of our experience is that we live in a broken world. Evil has invaded and touched everything in it. Evil is the opposite of good. That means that life just naturally tends toward good things coming to an end. It’s kind of like the law of entropy, where things naturally tend toward disorder. Laurie was expressing some frustration recently at the fact that a couple of years ago she had enough of the disorganization in her closet, especially with her sweaters. So she bought some dividers to create sections on a shelf so she could put her sweaters in organized sections. Her frustration came about because the sweaters had somehow become a mess again. The dividers weren’t working. The reason is, the only way to keep that system in place is to put time and energy into continuing to organize. If you don’t do that, the system gradually breaks down and things tend toward disorder. There is a law of evil in our world also. Things tend to move away from the good. So if there is a good thing, it’s going to come to an end.

If we have joy, it will feel wonderful for a time, but one of two things is going to happen. Either some thing or person will come along and do something that obliterates it, or over time it will just erode away. We all know this is how life is. It’s true that all good things come to an end. Nothing in this world lasts forever, and the joys of this world are all too transient. I don’t know if you follow such things, but the Padres just recently traded the guy who was their best hitter last year, Juan Soto, to the Yankees. They traded him because they can’t afford him. It made me think back to a year ago when the Padres went on a wild spending binge, seemingly signing everybody in sight to big contracts. For a longsuffering Padre fan like me it was unheard of. It was almost bewildering. But it was joyful and exciting. They built a team that looked like it might be the best in baseball. How did that joy turn out? It fizzled into the most disappointing team in Padres history, the owner who was the architect of that glorious spending spree died, and now they’re trading guys away because they can’t afford them. So it goes with joy in this world.

Jesus claimed the joy his disciples experienced would be the exception to the rule. Nothing could take it away. I thought about his analogy, that the joy they would have is like the joy of childbirth. That joy fades too, as the reality of taking care of an infant sets in. It is replaced by exhaustion and frustration as they send this infant home with you, but don’t give you an owner’s manual. So you have no idea what you’re doing. All you know is, you’d give almost anything for a few solid hours of sleep.

However, my experience with having those children says something else. Is that initial joy tempered by the overwhelming demands of taking care of a baby? In a way, yes. But the joy never goes away. Yes, in those early years there is much confusion and frustration because the baby is crying non-stop and you have no idea why, all you know is you’re exhausted. You do make it through that phase, but what comes next is called the “Terrible Two’s” when your child has mastered the art of the tantrum. It’s frustrating that they seem to save their most epic performances for the most public opportunities. That’s not joyful. Later that child will become a teenager who lets it be known that he or she finds admitting they actually have parents to be humiliating. You are a source of unendurable shame to your precious child. These things and so much more about raising children are not fun and don’t, of themselves, bring joy. But what I have found is that neither do they take away the joy. Laurie and I have gone through all the phases of having children, including the most tiring, confusing and frustrating parts of it. Through it all, those kids, and now their spouses and children too, have been a source of joy. All the hardship has not removed the joy. It has endured through all of it.

Jesus said the same would be true of the joy the disciples would have. They would know that Jesus was God in human form, that, as he said in verse 27, the Father himself loved them because they loved Jesus. They knew they could pray about everything and the Father would hear and answer them. They knew that some day they would follow in Jesus’ footsteps and go to the Father and live with him forever in his eternal kingdom. Nothing could take any of that away, so nothing could take away the joy of all of those blessings.

IMPLICATIONS

JOY IS AN ELEMENT OF THE AROMA OF CHRIST

Jesus made it clear that night that joy is crucial for his followers. Jesus had already said in chapter 15 that all he said to them was because he wanted them to have joy, and that their joy would be total. He wanted them to be filled with joy. We see that same message in this passage. This isn’t the only place we get that message in the Bible. Romans 12:12 tells us to always, “Be joyful in hope.” In Philippians 4:4 Paul says while in chains, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice!” The same command shows up in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 that tells us to rejoice always. Psalm 5:11 says, “Let all who take refuge in you (God) rejoice, let them ever sing for joy.” Psalm 118:24 says, “This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” We are called on to rejoice every day, to be glad in the day God has given us, whatever it may bring. Psalm 16:11 says that in God’s presence is fullness of joy. Joy to the max comes from being in the presence of God and resting in his love and goodness.

Jesus has made it crystal clear that one aspect of the aroma of Christ is love. He has called on us to love others as he does and said this is the defining characteristic of one of his followers. But he has also made the point that another aspect of the aroma of Christ will be joy. We will be joyful because we have something to be joyful about. We have that always, every minute of every day of our lives.

This makes sense. Thinking about this reminded me of one of the most joyous days of my life. It was August 24, 1979, the day we got married. There were a couple of things that happened that day that I didn’t want. There were elements included in our wedding that I didn’t want, but had to agree to in order to keep the peace. I wore a tuxedo. That is not a form of clothing designed for comfort. But none of it mattered, because Laurie was marrying me. I had her! None of those minor annoyances could take away the joy of having her. It honored her that I was joyful because of her, and that is still true today. Don’t you think that OGod is honored that we have joy because of him? Bishop Marmion said, “Joy is the echo of God’s life within us.” God is joyful, and where he is there will be joy.

JOY WILL BE ATTACKED

If you have joy in your life, someone or something will try to take it away. That is the nature of this world. So one might say, “All I have to do then is not have joy, then I’ll be left alone.” Perhaps, but you’ll have no joy, which means you are not experiencing the work of the Spirit of God, you are missing out on true life, and you are not giving off the aroma of Christ. And in addition you’ll be attacked anyway, because you have an enemy who hates you.

What are the things that can take away joy? Guilt, fear, anxiety, anger and loss are the things that pop to mind. There is no joy when we are feeling guilty. Fear and anxiety are a couple of major contributors to loss of joy. Anger at an other person or at something that has happened to you will obliterate joy. No one can be angry and joyful at the same time. The obvious is loss. It is not joyful when we lose someone especially, but sometimes even something that is valuable to us.

No matter how joyful you are, in this world it can vanish in an instant. A cruel word spoken to you, the loss of someone or something you value or love, an ominous possibility appearing in the future can all sap your joy.

THERE IS PERMANENT JOY AVAILABLE

Jesus promised his followers a joy that nothing could ever take away. I expect that they had that. Grave difficulty was ahead for all of them. Hurtful, painful, frightening things were going to happen to them. But those terrible things could never take away the great truth that Jesus had conquered death and in his grace and love had gained for them the eternal kingdom of God. Jesus was always going to be with them, and in his presence is the fullness of joy. That joy is forever.

In 2 Corinthians 6:10 Paul said he was “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.” It is possible to have hard, painful, sorrowful circumstances, and yet still rejoice. That comes from being in God’s presence. Can being in someone’s presence really bring us joy in the midst of sadness? Many years ago when our son, Toby, was in college I saw an example of that. It was the week of Thanksgiving. We had a large group coming to our house for Thanksgiving and Laurie was stressed by all the preparations for that. What made it tough was she got a nasty cold. She felt terrible. A couple of days before Thanksgiving Toby was going to come home from college. But driving home from San Luis Obispo meant going through LA traffic. Toby had learned the best way to handle that was to make the trip at night so he went through LA late when traffic was merely bad instead of cosmically awful. So he was not going to get home until around midnight. By 9 PM Laurie was toast. She said she was going to bed. I affirmed she needed to rest, and told her I would stay up until Toby got home. She went quickly to sleep. Toby arrived a little before midnight. I was surprised when just after he got home Laurie made an appearance. She wanted to greet Toby. I assumed she would tell him she was happy he was home and go back to bed, but she didn’t. She stayed up for hours, enjoying talking to Toby. She was happier and more lively than she had been for several days. She was joyful, despite the fact that she felt awful, because she got joy from being in his presence. David insisted we can have the same experience being in the presence of our Lord. The more we live with him and enjoy him the more we can have joy regardless of circumstances. We can even be sorrowful, but rejoicing.

I mentioned we had little 18 month old Hunter with us for several days. One day he was getting a little tired. He had been playing hard with Nana, so Nana asked if he’d like to watch TV for a bit. He thought that was a good idea. Laurie turned on the TV and he sat down to watch. But she put on a Winnie the Pooh show. He didn’t want Winnie the Pooh, and then something happened in the show that bothered him. He completely melted down. I was upstairs and I thought he must have terribly injured himself because the screaming was so intense. Laurie quickly changed the show to Bluey, the current hit show for kids, and he calmed down. He was joyful, but then he wasn’t getting what he wanted, and his joy was vaporized immediately and replaced by weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

**To have permanent joy, it must be the result of a permanent blessing**. When we derive joy from transient things, necessarily the joy will be transient. It cannot last because the thing that provoked it does not last. Typically our joy comes from getting what we think we want, and when we don’t, or we do but it is taken away, we also melt down, much like Hunter. Just not in as vivid a way as he did. It’s fine to experience that transient joy. We all will, and it’s good, but it is no substitute for permanent joy.

Think about what takes away joy. **Regret or guilt** drains joy from us. There are 2 things we can do to keep that from happening. First, make the most of every day. Be fully present, seize the opportunities. We tend to think of that as doing things that are going to be fun and memorable, but that’s not really the main issue. Make the most of the day by doing the right thing, by serving God with all your heart today. The regret that hurts will come from failing to do that. Second, live in the reality of what Jesus has gained for you. You are forgiven. Totally forgiven and loved. So trust in that and rejoice.

**Fear** saps our joy. I had an appointment with my oncologist a couple of weeks ago to set up the monitoring phase of my care. Next on the calendar for me is a CT scan of my chest in March. I asked why they would scan my chest. He said, “We can see by looking at your head that the melanoma is gone. We can inspect that to make sure it is not coming back. The most likely place it will go if it were to spread is your lungs, so we look for that.” This is my reality. I’d like him to say, “Yeah, the melanoma is gone for good and you’re all done.” And it is possible that is true. But they don’t know for sure, so it is important to monitor for it. That is not joyful. This past year has been a reminder to me that fearing what might happen in the future keeps me from rejoicing and being glad in today. I have been practicing doing what God tells us. Rejoice in this day. We don’t know what the future holds, so let’s not let fear of it sap the joy from the only day we have for sure, which is today.

Our joy will be permanent to the degree that it is the product of something permanent. And the reality is that only God and his goodness and presence are permanent. We will be able to be permanently joyful as long as our joy is derived from Jesus’ victory over death and all that it has brought to us. It will be permanent when it is from living in the presence of God, which is the source of true fullness of joy.

**Discontentment** can ruin joy. Years ago Laurie and I were thrilled when we got an absurdly good deal to stay at a gorgeous resort. We had walked through this resort a couple of times in the past and were awed by its beauty, but it was way out of our budget, forever, we thought. But now we got to stay there, and it was glorious. One day I was at the front desk and couldn’t help over hearing a conversation between another guest and an employee. I learned this man had an ocean front suite, one of the best rooms in the facility, but he was complaining. He was complaining about nits, trivial things that revealed demands that were absurd. He was angry over these things. We were in one of the worst rooms in the resort, and were overjoyed. He was in the best, but had no joy.

Do not let disappointments eclipse the joy of the much greater gift you have because Jesus is alive. Many years ago we were at Disney World for a vacation, staying at one of the Disney hotels. Our hotel had a big store where you could buy some food, sundries, and, of course, Disney souvenirs and paraphernalia. I was in that store buying some cereal when I observed a family of 5, Mom, Dad, and 3 children. One of the kids was a girl about 4 years old. She decided that she wanted one of those big suckers Disney sells. But Mom and Dad said no. She became more insistent, but Mom and Dad didn’t give in. Then the little girl threw a majestic tantrum. Live was not worth living if she couldn’t have that sucker. I couldn’t help but think that little girl needed to think about where she was. Her parents had spent huge sums of money to bring the family to Orlando and obtain expensive lodgings at that hotel, as well as buying tickets for the Disney parks. They did that to give a gift of fun to the kids. She should have been overflowing with unbounded gratitude to her parents for what they were doing for her and her siblings. Instead she was inconsolable because she couldn’t have a dumb sucker. That can and does happen to us. God has given us priceless, incomparable gifts in Jesus Christ. Those eternal gifts are the source of eternal joy. And yet we throw tantrums because we don’t have some little thing we have focused on that is smaller compared to God’s great gifts than a sucker is compared to a Disney World vacation. The disappointments, hurts and losses of life can be truly sorrowful, but in the midst of those sorrows we can still have joy because of the permanent and immeasurable joy we have in Jesus Christ.