

Joy Notes

Thoughts on Choosing the Joyful Life



By Judy Lemezis
and The Encouragement Cafe
2018



Joy Notes

by Judy Lemezis and the Encouragement Cafe

Author's note: These notes were originally published as a seven day series in the winter of 2018-2019 with the hope of inspiring us to choose joy.

All the art work is original. Many of the notes include poetry by others and is so indicated.

Thanks to everyone for your support and joyful consideration of these ideas.

*"Joy is a decision, a really brave one,
about how you are going to respond to life."
Wess Stafford*

A long time ago I was part of a hospice team. Every year we visited county nursing home residents to host a holiday singalong. We always asked the residents for requests. I've never forgotten the moment one elderly woman slowly stood up with the assistance of an aide. She swayed unsteadily on her feet but her voice rang out loud and strong:

JOY! long pause..... TO THE WORLD!

It was a command, not a request.

For a thousand different reasons it can be difficult to feel joy. But I've been thinking a lot about joy these days. I've been studying joy. What if the world didn't have to be any different but we were different? What if, as commanded, we found Joy?

I know that no one's life is exempt from pain and sorrow. But I also know that we have the opportunity to feel more joy in our life. Take a chance on joy and consider these thoughts on joy. You might be surprised, you might be unsettled. You may be filled with hope. And you might find more joy. Please, join me on this journey - the world can sure use more joy.



Joy as Decision

All of our lives are a mix of pain and joy. Our mind seems drawn to dwell on and fret over pain. This can become a habit. Today when negative thoughts arise, decide to pull your attention away from them and instead put your attention on the joy in the day. You might be surprised by how much there is! The more often you do this, the more you will find it becomes second nature.

By no means is this easy to do. Still, if you hunt for joy, you will find it.

Here is a Chinese proverb I love:

"You cannot stop the birds of sorrow from flying over your head, but you can stop them from nesting in your hair."



Joy as the Present Moment

We've made the decision to look for joy. We need not look any further than the present moment - that's right - the one we're in right now. With our willingness, our attention, and with an open mind and heart, we slow down long enough to notice the ordinary beauty of our lives. In that stillness there is a presence in the moment that transcends the incessant anxiety and busyness of our mind. Joy means different things to all of us - but I suspect words like 'peace' and 'serenity' and 'connection' come close to a universal description of joy. Joy frequently brings a soft smile to the face.

Joy is not only to be celebrated during a special season or on a specific day. Joy is for every day.



Joy as Necessity

We need joy to make our way through the challenges of life. Joy helps us respond to stress in life enhancing ways, joy boosts our resilience and renews our energy. Our joyful heart creates the groundwork for good decisions, for generosity and community. Joy helps us show up in the world to share who we are and share our gifts.

While you may question that joy is an appropriate response in light of the suffering in the world, actually Joy provides the fuel we need to continue to do our work with a hopeful, compassionate heart.





Joy as Action

"Peace is joy at rest. Joy is peace on its feet."

Anne Lamott

Let me borrow Anne Lamott's words and say that Right Action is also Joy on its feet. Generosity, kindness, clear thinking and compassion flow naturally from the joy-filled heart. Our true nature is no longer obstructed by fear. Out of our abundance the inevitable response is that we want to share.

I like Naomi Shibab Nye's words in her poem, *So Much Happiness*:

*Since there is no place large enough
to contain so much happiness,
you shrug, you raise your hands, and it flows out of you
into everything you touch. You are not responsible.
You take no credit, as the night sky takes no credit
for the moon, but continues to hold it, and share it,
and in that way be known.*



Joy Anyway or How to Be a Joy Rebel

Finding the joy in life calls you to dig deep and find out how determined you can be, how tenacious and downright stubborn and rebellious your spirit is. Our world is not easy to be in. Joy asks us to respond 'Yes' to life, no matter what.

Poet Jack Gilbert challenges us to "risk delight... *We must have the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world.*"

How stubborn are we? How defiant can we be to risk feeling the joy in this world, *anyway*?

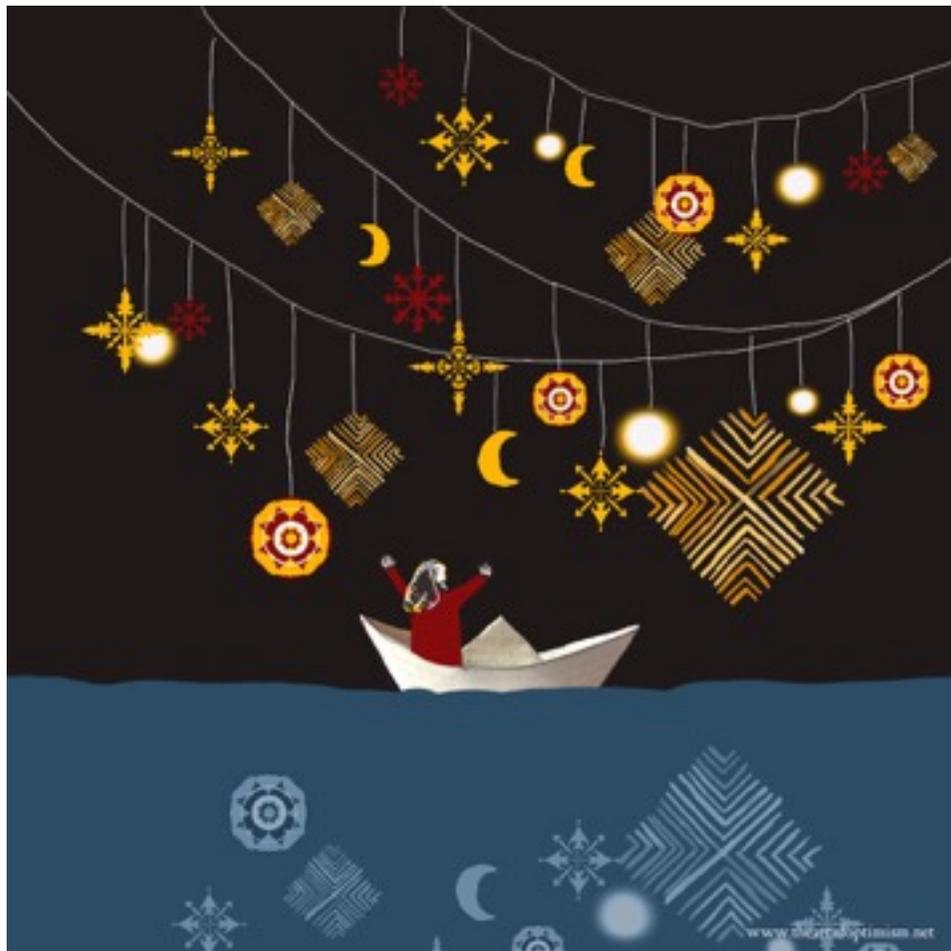


Joy as Gratitude

*"It is not joy that makes us grateful;
it is gratitude that makes us joyful."
David Steindl-Rast*

Poet Ross Gay says in *Sorrow is Not My Name*, "there are, on this planet alone, something like two million naturally occurring sweet things". Find the sweet ordinary things in your life. Bring Wonder along. How amazing to be alive and part of this world.

Deep gratitude for both the ordinary and extraordinary **in the present moment** lead to feelings of deep joy.



Joy as Gift

*"If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate.
Give in to it...joy was not meant to be a crumb"*

You've got to love Mary Oliver. From her poem, *Mindful*,

*It was what I was born for - to look, to listen, to lose myself
inside this soft world - to instruct myself over and over in joy...*

As Mary Oliver says, "give in to it". Instruct yourself in joy. Wonder about joy. Flirt with it, go on date night with it, paint yourself with it, take a bath in it. Argue with it if you must, but give it a chance. Go for the whole cake, not just crumbs. Its the gift you give yourself.

And then, *pass it on*. Have joy conversations with your friends - ask "What brings you joy?" "What is joy like for you?" Let your joyful spirit brighten up the room, lift someone's spirits, spread hope to the world. Its no small thing. It actually just may be everything.



For you!