

## **The Woo Woo And The Weird Of Rejoicing**

### **Philippians 4:4-7**

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Do not worry about anything,

but in everything by prayer

and supplication with thanksgiving

let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,

will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

# **The Woo Woo And The Weird Of Rejoicing**

Luke 4:4-7

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Rev. Michael Catanzaro

## **I.**

I fully admit that today's sermon it is a pop-up fly and I'm back-pedaling into the far out reaches of left field; whether or not it will go over the fence, or be an easy out to close the inning will be for you to decide. In my defense, it isn't all my fault; but I certainly will not hesitate to take full responsibility for everything I'm about to say.

I did a great deal of driving this week. First a trip down to Allentown PA at the start of the week, then a trip over to Burlington VT at the end of the week. I always enjoy driving for the opportunity it affords to let one's mind wander, and wander it most certainly did; mostly about today's scripture reading from Luke's Gospel. If we weren't still in the midst of COVID, we'd be singing a song from my youth: *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice. 2x Rejoice, Rejoice and again I say rejoice. 2x*

## **II.**

Frankly, though, I'm having a hard time giving myself over to the notion of rejoicing. Which is always the case with me around Christmas time (a counterintuitive job hazard it seems) but it is especially true this year given the events of the past week. Thankfully, on my drive over to Burlington I had the good sense, or dumb luck (so often a very fine line) to ring up Mark Adams, my woods-hippie, horse-logger friend out in Minnesota.

Sure enough, Mark quickly shifted my paradigm; which is just one of his many super powers. Turns out I wasn't looking at rejoicing in the proper light; rather than trying to stare directly at it, rejoicing is most easily seen out of the corner of one's eye. Whereas some people dive deep into one or two specific areas of life, Mark gathers from far and wide on just about any subject, method or modality. Which, in and of it self is pretty keen, but what is truly unique is his penchant and talent for synthesizing all that information in a steady stream of insight.

### III.

Mark is one of the few people in my life with whom I can have a “get right down to it” conversation about “The Weird”; or, as he refers to it, “The Woo Woo.” That is to say the mystical, non-rational and synchronistic aspects of existence. If you’ve ever experienced Deja Vu, felt a premonition or sense of foreboding, given yourself over to intuition, believed yourself on a run of good or bad luck or put stock in fate or destiny, well then, “Congratulations!” you have dipped your toes into the Weird and experienced the Woo Woo.

It is a very deep pool, however, with wild and unpredictable currents swirling just below the surface and only a little way off-shore. For some, the Woo Woo is a pleasant distraction or an amusing diversion. For many people, the Weird is a little *too* weird (thank you very much). However, for a certain few, like Mark and me, the Woo Woo and the Weird is what makes the most sense and, hence, where we choose to make our stand; if only because it is an awful lot of fun.

### IV.

Though it has been over 30 years since I lived in Minnesota, Mark and I have kept in regular contact for that entire span; speaking every few months, often for hours at a time. At some point in each of those conversations, one of us will ask the question, “Have you seen any sign?” That is, sign of the Weird and the Woo Woo: how things just seem to work out, or how a truth is revealed, or some strange happenstance, or some life-changing event, or picked up on the vibe of the universe, or seen the hand of God, or received an awesome grace, or finally learned the valuable lesson the divine has been placing at your feet for far too long; or, failing the truly impressive, simply stumbling upon another way of looking at the wonder of the world to better understand our true place in it. Or, at the very least, get a chuckle out of it.

### V.

This past week Mark turned me on to author Dr. Masaru Emoto, and his 2005 NY Times best selling book, The Hidden Messages in Water. Clearly a person with great imagination and a little too much time on his hands, Emoto used high-speed photography to discover that crystals formed in frozen water revealed changes when specific, concentrated thoughts were directed toward them. He found that water from clear springs and water exposed to loving words and beautiful, melodic music showed brilliant, complex, and colorful snowflake patterns. In contrast, polluted water, or water exposed to negative thoughts and harsh sounds, form incomplete, asymmetrical patterns with dull colors.

In short, what Emoto argued is that if the molecular structure of water can be changed by the presence of nearby human consciousness or expression, then we should be aware of, and explore, how our consciousness and expression can positively impact not only our own physical, mental and spiritual health, but the health and harmony of the earth itself. Full disclosure: in his book, Emoto states these results are the fruit of, "exhaustive and wildly unscientific research."

## **VI.**

Unsurprisingly, Emoto's work has come under a great deal of scrutiny and criticism. Of the book, one reviewer wrote: "It is about as scientific as Alice in Wonderland. Emoto took pictures of snowflakes and "observed" that clean water made prettier crystals." Biochemist William Reville, dismissed it as "an amalgam of science and mumbo-jumbo, there is no credible hypothesis as to causation, no development of the idea, no fruitfulness in the concept and, above all, no clear scientific demonstration." On the book becoming a *NY Times Bestseller*, literary critic Dwight Garner wrote, "it was one of those 'head-scratchers' that made him question the sanity of the reading public." Physicist Kenneth Libbrecht, an expert on snow, suggested the possibility of confirmation bias, noting that "it's good to have an open mind, but not so open that your brains fall out!" Clearly, too much Woo and Weird for these folks and many like them. Which is fine and, perhaps, well justified.

## **VII.**

Still, there are some for whom the book resonated. Caroline M. Myss, author of the books Sacred Contracts and Anatomy of the Spirit called the book "magnificent" and said, "Through his genius photography and superb scientific skill, Emoto has created a book that is truly a mystical treasure. His contribution to research in spiritual consciousness is positively masterful." Marcus Laux, editor of *Naturally Well Today*, said, "As with Galileo, Newton, and Einstein, Emoto's clear vision helps us see ourselves and our universe differently. Science and spirit unite, resulting in a profound and undeniable quantum leap in how we view our world, and how we can reclaim our health and create peace. And, Noelle C. Nelson, PhD, stated, "Emoto's work with water beautifully illustrates the healing power of love and gratitude. These building blocks of appreciation support our well-being in body, mind, heart, and soul, and is a most valuable contribution to the creation of a positive future for our world."

## **VIII.**

Regardless of what the critics or advocates have to say, the simple truth is that over 400,000 people bought the book and it has been translated into twenty-four languages. What *kind* of simple truth this might be, however, I cannot say. Either that a great many people are lost and searching for anything onto which they might cling, or that more and more, people are beginning to open themselves up to the possibility (or probability) that there is more to reality than meets the eye, or than we have been led or allowed to believe.

I think this has been true in every age, though certainly I would agree that of late, such truths are being amplified by technology and social media. However, it is also the case that such truths are being encouraged, or even facilitated, through the abandonment of the mystical by the historical haven for it; namely, the church.

## **IX.**

The greater truth, is that there is very little of the Weird or the Woo Woo remaining in the church; not the good kind of Woo or Weird, anyway. Not only is this our shame, it is our loss. So as to reverse the trend, let us look through a different lens of examination.

Retreat coach Linda Potter, in her work with women, often employs a model of causation and control which states: One must always begin with our circumstance, over which we may or may not have control. Circumstances cause our thoughts, which cause our feelings, which lead to our actions, and, then, yield our result. Reinforcing this, modern Psychology tells us what we control, and where we really start to create our reality, is in how we perceive/interpret/think about the events in our life that generate our feelings about those events, and how we subsequently respond with our behavior. No one can choose our thoughts or actions, these are ours alone, and for which we have utter freedom and complete responsibility.

## **X.**

What Mark Adams and I would tell you as it regards the Woo Woo and the Weird, is that not only will you find what you looking for in life and, so, to be careful about that for which you wish, Moreover, that our thoughts represent energy (either good or bad) which will not only *go somewhere*, it will *create*

something. With the “where” being our world and those around us, and the “thing” being the person we become.

Regardless of how others would, or have, understood the words of the Apostle Paul in the chapter 4 of Philippians when he says, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice,” Mark and I would tell you that this is an invitation to engage not only in the mystical *experience* of God but, also, an invitation to enter into a mystical *participation with* God such that the discipline of Rejoicing becomes the *means* by which we change our world, and ourselves; not just in general terms but, perhaps, at the molecular level.

## **XI.**

As the church, now in the midst of Advent, we await the birth of the Prince of Peace. In the secular world, at Christmas, we often hear about the hope of peace on earth good will to all. What Paul says to us today, is that if we want a peace which passes all understanding, we must begin by rejoicing.

The Greek word for rejoicing, χαίρω (transliterated as chairó, and pronounced khah'-ee-ro) literally means to *experience* God's grace; that is, to be *consciously* glad for God's grace. In fact, the Greek word for grace, χάρις / xáris, shares the same etymological root as the word for rejoicing and, therefore, the same core or fundamental meaning. We don't experience grace without rejoicing. Rejoicing is the outward sign of the experience of an inner grace. The delight of rejoicing is what discovers grace.

Which, of course, is easier said than done; and why Paul uses this particular phrasing: Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS, and AGAIN I say REJOICE! Meaning, we have to keep after it. No matter what.

## **XII.**

Tuesday morning I got call to inform me that my mother had fallen, the result of which was a fractured a rib, compression fractures to the vertebrae, a nasty gash to the head requiring numerous staples to close, and a badly injured if not fractured hip. Which is why I was driving to Burlington, to be with her at Fletcher-Allen Hospital.

About 5 minutes after I received *that* call, I got another call from the new Assisted Living facility in Buffalo to which we've been planning to move her,

saying that they were ready to receive her. I stayed for several days in Burlington, but had to return to Canton to officiate yesterday's funeral for Patience's husband who, tragically, had died earlier in the week from COVID. I'm not sure which was worse, seeing my mother all banged up knowing we were two days shy from not having this happen, or seeing Cameron and Aubrey mourning the loss of their father.

### **XIII.**

Later Saturday afternoon, Linda and I had been invited by Rich Grayson to attend a "surprise" party for his wife, Ellen, on the occasion of her 75th birthday. For the past several weeks, Rich and I have been practicing a very lovely song he wanted to sing to her at the party, and I was to accompany him on guitar.

Aware of everything that was going on, Rich texted and said: "SO sorry to hear about Nancy's accident. I can't imagine the emotional turmoil that must throw you into, especially with the funeral Saturday. Relative to all that, is Saturday afternoon. PLEASE drop that from your schedule. I can do it Acapella and will feel much better doing that if it'll relieve your day in some way." I responded, "Working on my sermon now, text is 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.' Given the recent turn of events, more important than ever to rejoice with you."

### **XIV.**

Then, I texted him again, saying, "If you are going to be taught a lesson, might as well learn it." Which, of course, is a variation on what Mark Adams and I have concluded is the only one true prayer in life: to not get hit any harder the next time for not having learned the lesson this time. *That* is putting the Woo Woo and the Weird into practice.

As you might well imagine, Ellen's party was a ton of fun and a huge success, with the song he sang to her, entitled "The Sweetest Thing," being the emotional highlight which left nary a dry eye in the room. It was the kind of rejoicing to which the Apostle Paul calls us today. Family and friends coming together to rejoice in our lives, and in the grace which God has gifted us. The very same thing we try to do here in worship every Sunday morning: as we practice and preach the Woo Woo and the Weird of Rejoicing. Amen.