

“Joyful Faces Turned Toward Heaven”

Sixth Sunday of Lent, March 28, 2021

*“We are using this season of Lent to envision God’s mission for Highland
on the other side of the Coronavirus Exile”*

Nehemiah 8:9-12

The Context

Nehemiah 8-13 describe multiple post-wall activities of dedication and reform

Nehemiah 8:1-8: reacquainting people with the Law

The people’s response was to weep

Shame, regret, fear

The Call to Rejoice

The beginning a new era

The fuel to drive a holy life is to be joy

Not duty, not fear

What about love? Yes. But joyful love instead of dutiful love.

The joy of the Lord is your strength

Either “the joy that is in God” or “the joy that God gives” or both

The First Step of the Joy Journey

The Celebration of the Feast of Booths (Sukkot): Nehemiah 8:13-18

An eight day festival connected both to harvest and to wilderness wandering

It was to be an occasion for joy: see Leviticus 23:40

Eat and sleep in little temp tents covered with palm branches or others

Jewish scholars see Jesus’ Palm Sunday story as a Sukkot celebration

In the time of Jesus the Sukkot celebration had strong messianic overtones

What is Joy?

Comparing it to its companion happiness

Happiness is a carefree delight when sources of sadness or fear are absent

Joy: heart-pounding intuition/anticipation of an immense goodness closing in

Weeping tarries for the night, but joy comes in the morning: Psalm 30:5

Jesus, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross: Hebrews 12:2

As such, these things follow:

- Joy is a deeper emotional reality in relation to the immensity it is responding to
- Joy can co-exist with trouble, sorrow, fear
- Joy has an abiding reality that can be consistent
- Joy and hope are intertwined
- Imagination and faith are deep components of accessing joy
- If the anticipation of the coming goodness is joy, the full immersion in that goodness can only be described as “fullness of joy”: Psalm 16:11

The Holy is Hospitable to Joy

Nehemiah 8:9: this day is holy, therefore do not mourn or weep

Solemnity opposes the frivolous but not the joyful

Joy is the Proper Fuel of Mission

Nehemiah 8:10: connects joy and generosity

Sharing the feast with the poor, inviting them into joy

This informs Highland’s visioning process in this way:

Joy is to be our fuel for mission

People are not necessarily drawn by moral behavior or smart arguments

People can be drawn by love (that is not tainted with duty)

People are certainly drawn by the evidence of abiding joy

The success metric of our mission plan will be the palpable presence of joy