Joy

The words written in English sustained my curiosity as the brilliance of the reflected sunlight drew my attention to bronze plaque. As common occurrences in small European towns, memorials become fascinating tourist tidbits. Sometimes due to translation, other times to tourist fatigue, the cause of the memorial becomes trivialized and routine. Yet, as I encountered this particular plaque, the words were unequal to the magnitude of the message. A war, a town, a victory, a deep gratitude, an honor given to the liberators of the town of Spa, Belgium understated the extreme relief from Nazi occupation in 1945. The simplicity of the design radiated their joy. I stood in front of it, experiencing their deliverance and imagining their joy.

Joy. A simple yet deeply complex word that becomes universal as every human will experience desire and fulfillment. Still, joy becomes prescriptive and uniquely diverse as we each have actions we ascribe to the word. Joy may be identified as an intense feeling of happiness (noun), while in action is an experience of great pleasure and delight (verb). Webster even considers the action part of joy synonymous with triumph. But triumph implicates struggle, often long awaited, unanticipated and enduring. When struggles seem endless, I forget joy and fixate on the longing for better words, better choices, and better actions. I want to add to joy instead of subtracting from it, often failing miserably.

Yet, as the waves of life in 2020 continue to redefine routines and patterns, I’m realizing joy is not circumstantial. Joy is prompted by Jesus. I’m resonating on his words “In this world you will have trouble. ***But take heart!*** I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Take heart, says my Savior. Choose joy. Choose my deliverance. Desire to experience life in my victory that will never fade, and much has faded this year. Traditions, gatherings, holy spaces of human connection, worship - all redefined and unfamiliar. Jesus guides us to act through taking heart – choosing his triumph and the deep, eternal, sustaining joy undeterred by circumstance or burden. Joy doesn’t erase the weariness, hurt or loneliness, but it offers fulfillment through hope in Jesus’ promise that he has overcome the world. Hope that the suffering heals and we live as citizens in a new kingdom here and in the Father’s house. Perhaps that is why hope precedes joy as we look to Advent as a season of expectation. The awaited savior, the baby born of a virgin, came for us…and he never fades.

Take heart, my friends. Choose joy.

A picture containing outdoor, building, old, stone

Description automatically generated

A picture containing text, person, phone, cellphone

Description automatically generated