



Rev Chris Taylor - 2-3-19
Best of All

Before there was the book *Jesus Calling*, there was *God Calling* - a book created in the early 1930's by two women who decided they would spend time each day listening to God, and that then they would write down what they heard. They wanted to take hold of Jesus' promise that wherever two or more are gathered in his name, that he would be there. They believed that if they did this together instead of alone, that they might find God doing something special as a result. And God did.

The women chose to remain anonymous, but they were clear up front that there was nothing particularly special about either one. As one of them put it, "We were not in any way psychic or advanced in spiritual growth, but just very ordinary human beings, who had had more suffering and worry than the majority and who had known tragedy after tragedy."ⁱ

To this day we still don't know who they were, but in his forward the publisher describes them as "two poor, brave women [who] were courageously fighting against sickness and penury. They were facing a hopeless future and one of them even longed to be quit of this hard world for good. And then [the Lord] spoke. And spoke again!"ⁱⁱ

Keeping their struggles in mind has been helpful for me as I've made my way through the devotional. Some might find it too simple, or even trite. I don't. For me, when I think about their struggles and what these words would have meant to them, I find my heart filled with a sense of God's tenderness and care.

There is one part that I find myself coming back to again and again. It is in the introduction; the point when one of the women shares the challenge the two of them heard as the book began to emerge:

Always, and this daily, [the Lord] insisted that we should be channels of Love, Joy and Laughter in His broken world... We, or rather I, found this

command very difficult to obey, although to others it might have been wimple. To laugh, to cheer others, to be always joyful when days were pain-racked, nights tortured by chronic insomnia, when poverty and almost insupportable worry were our daily portion, when prayer went unanswered and God's face was veiled and fresh calamities came upon us?

Still came this insistent command to love and laugh, and be joy-bringers to the lives we contacted.

Disheartened, one of us would gladly have ceased the struggle and passed on to another an happier life.

But He encouraged us daily, saying that He would not break the instruments that He intended to use...ⁱⁱⁱ

Channels of love and joy and laughter in this broken world; an "insistent" call (as she puts it) to love and laugh and be joy-bringers: those are the words that have been stirring around in my mind ever since I first read them – the connecting point to what I think the Apostle Paul is getting at here in our text this morning with his call to love.

If we are channels of love, joy and laughter then there are a number of things we aren't doing: we aren't criticizing those around us; we aren't focused on all the ways they are falling short; we aren't showing off; we aren't trying to prove that we are somehow better or more insightful or more gifted. If we are channels of love, joy and laughter then we aren't trying to prove anything at all. We aren't thinking about what we have or don't have or what we need to be truly happy. We aren't thinking about ourselves.

Try to picture being a channel of love and joy and laughter. Imagine what that would look like in your homes or where you work. Can you see it? Can you feel the difference that spirit would bring – the warmth, the freedom?

I don't know what tragedies befell these two women. I don't know the specifics of their struggles or their sufferings. But from what little we do know, it seems like if there was anyone who had reason to complain or to cry out against God it was these two women. So where, exactly, were they supposed to find this love and joy and laughter?

The mistake we so often make is in thinking that qualities like that are dependent upon our outward circumstances – that people who are suffering or struggling or faced with tragedy couldn't possibly find them. We bring that kind of thinking into our own lives: "If I could just find the right person; or get that promotion; or make a certain amount of money then my life would come together, then I would find peace and joy." We connect the experience of peace and joy and even happiness with what's going on in the externals of our lives. But that's not where we are going to find them.

One example: you may know by now how much I love to sail. One of my dreams is to get a boat some day and sail the Mediterranean. I think it would be incredible. But while I expect that I would thoroughly enjoy the experience, I don't believe that it could make me happier. If I haven't found joy and peace here and now, then I'm not going to find it then. These qualities that we long for aren't dependent on our circumstances. They are something we find in our hearts. They are grounded in our relationship with God.

That's what those two women found in spite of all their struggles. It is what gives this devotional its distinctive message and power. Here's how they put it in the devotion for this past Wednesday: "Every quiet time is an opportunity to retreat into that place within you where I dwell and where you can meet with Me. Never fear, for in that place you shall find restoration and power and joy and healing... All success lies in love, joy, and peace, the attributes of the world of miracles. You have to see your inner lives are all they should be, and then the work is accomplished. Love, joy, and peace are won on the battlefield of the soul, not in rushing and striving on the material plane.^{iv}"

In our hearts. Not out there...

How can the Apostle call us to love when there are some people in this world who drive us up a wall; some people that we are prone to despise? He can do it because the love he lifts before us isn't about people being good enough or somehow worthy. It is not about the externals. Like the joy and peace those two women found, it is rather, about relationship with God. It comes out of that place in our hearts where God abides.

The choice to love doesn't always come easily or naturally. We love, rather, because that is the essence of the God we worship. We share love and joy and laughter because we've found Jesus, and it is Jesus – not our circumstances – who makes all the difference in our hearts and in our lives.

ⁱ Anonymous, *God Calling*, Lacie Stevens and Patti Velasquez editors, (Whitecaps Media, Houston, 2012), p. xix

ⁱⁱ Ibid., p.xiv

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., pp. xix, xx

^{iv} Ibid., “January 30”