

Flexing Our Hope Muscle – Source of Our Joy

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It seems to me that in these recent months of what I might call winter pessimism, these summer months have raised up glimmers of sunshine in which a good number of individuals, groups and institutions have made counter-cultural choices-to write a narrative of hope and healing as opposed to despair and hopelessness. There are many I have noticed of late, but I would like to choose one very specific example.

This reflection piggybacks on what has recently been introduced as a new feature of “On Being”, the popular Krista Tippett radio and podcast series that explores the milieu of what may be called the “spiritual geniuses’ of our time.

With one of her audio producers, Marie Sambilay, she has fashioned a new feature entitled “Living the Questions”, addressing issues posed by people on social media. Probably at the top of the list is the one alluded to here – how to be present to what is happening in the world without giving in to despair and hopelessness.

What is needed, they conclude, is a type of spiritual discipline to stay grounded in what is happening in our world, to take a both/and stance to reality, to humanity, and to our world, but to choose to focus on “ a narrative of healing, and of hope and of goodness.”

Krista and Marie urge us to keep flexing and strengthening our hope muscle, to work really hard to counter the cultural shift we may be experiencing; to hold out for the long view, the ability to overcome the joylessness that seems to characterize hard working people, trying to do good, but overcome with experiencing this as burdensome, and for whom joy may seem like a privilege.

But Joy is not a privilege. Joy is a piece of human resilience. It’s a human birthright, they insist.

Is that not we believe underlies Good Shepherd mission and ministry? Do we not hear so often about Mary Euphrasia's wonder, her awe at all God's doings, her sheer joy shared with so many, despite her struggles and difficulties? Did she not see so many graces beyond her current experience of "crosses?" And was she not called "the mother of hope?"

Have we not met so many people we have been privileged to love and serve, to work and partner with in mission, who have supported and strengthened and prayed us through difficult and good times alike? People who have enabled us "to keep our joy muscle intact" as it has been put.

And are we not chosen to be those kinds of people who want to "call the world not just to justice but to joy and to flourishing, of which joy is a part?" It is up to us to find those ways and those places where that is also what we are finding and stirring and keeping alive in others." We call that effort Good Shepherd Zeal. May it hold us and keep us and sustain us in extending "life to the full" to all we encounter.

For Reflection:

How might I understand and experience that "spiritual discipline" that allows me to "choose a different narrative" in order to counter the hopelessness and despair that all too often colors our world with the gloominess of negativity?

In what places and with what people might I find the means to flex and strengthen my hope muscle? To nourish my Zeal?

How do I personally witness to hope? Who has witnessed to hope for me (past and/or present "spiritual geniuses", but nonetheless very real people.)