

## Lent Week 6: Joy

This week's fruit of the Spirit is Joy; a fruit perhaps more traditionally associated with Easter rather than Lent.

I wonder what comes to mind for you when we think about joy? It makes me think of the film, 'Inside Out', and the character Joy, who is the energetic, enthusiastic and tirelessly optimistic emotion at the heart of the young girl, Riley. Joy might come close to resembling her oft mistaken counterpart, happiness, who is far more superficial and transitory, were it not for the realisation that fully being herself only comes through embracing sadness and grief.

In purely human terms, it's somewhat remarkable that Jesus spoke of joy the night before he died, amidst the loss of leaving his friends. He told his disciples that he wanted them to have his joy and for their joy to be complete. What this joy looks like is only perhaps only understandable in the light of the preceding verses about Jesus abiding in the love of the Father: joy is grounded in love.

This makes complete sense to me. The times I've experienced deepest joy, have been times of overwhelming love. But they've also been times of intense suffering, most significantly, journeying with our daughter, who died surrounded by indescribable love at a local children's hospice. Joy then, isn't a fruit given in an absence of suffering, or only at Easter rather than in Lent, and it's markedly different to our temporary fixes of happiness – in fact, those can often get in the way of true joy.

It was the German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who wrote during his imprisonment that 'the joy of God goes through the poverty of the manger and the agony of the cross; that is why it is invincible, irrefutable'. As we journey closer to the cross in the weeks ahead, can we pray to be a church so grounded in the abiding love of the Father, that we cannot but radiate God's invincible and irrefutable joy? Can we reach out again to a world deeply unsatisfied with the delusion of happiness and crying out for Jesus' true joy from the inside out? And may you be blessed with great joy in doing so.

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