

Ezra 3:8-13
Weeping for Joy!
Sunday March 4th, 2018

Last week we explored this verse from Zechariah, “**Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit says the Lord of hosts.**” in reference to the return from exile by the Jews and the rebuilding of the Temple. This was the 2nd Temple or King Zerubbabel’s Temple.

We see that this was by the Spirit and power of God in verses 1 & 2 of Ezra 1, “In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, **the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:** “This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and **he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.**”

God moved Cyrus’ heart and the Exiles returned from Persia. In 537BC Cyrus destroyed the Babylonians who had destroyed the King Solomon’s temple and exiled the Jews. In 536BC the Jews were sent back to Jerusalem by Cyrus and started to rebuild the Temple.

In our scripture today we heard two very different ways of personally expressing joy and gratitude: **shouts of joy and weeping for joy.** These were two very different ways of expressing the same emotion and thought: gratitude!

When I was Jr. High age, one afternoon, a policeman came and knocked on the door of our home and told me and my mom that my younger brother was trapped in a storm sewer here in Tucson that was on fire. The seriousness with which he said it convinced me that my brother was dying if not dead. I ran to my room weeping and stayed there for about a half an hour that felt like half a lifetime.

Then the doorbell rang again and low and behold there again was a policeman and... my brother! He was dirty covered with soot. He smelled like a burnt hotdog. But he was alive. My tears immediately

went from tears of sorry to tears of Joy!!! Yes, indeed we can weep for Joy!!!

Romans 12:15 enjoins us to “Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.” But not all who weep are sad. They are glad beyond what words can express.

I remember almost 37 years ago my beautiful bride coming down the aisle on our wedding day. She was as cool and calm as a cucumber. I cried. It is funny; men and women are like that on their wedding days the men are more prone to cry the women are calm.

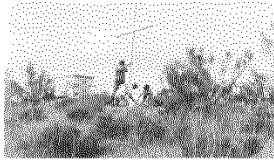
This week I went to the yearly Pastor’s Gathering. The speaker this year was Diana Butler Bass. She spoke mostly about **gratitude**. She spoke about how important gratitude is and how we express it individually and corporately. She spoke about how important an “**attitude of gratitude**” is to our mental, physical and spiritual health.

It was a God moment to me, or what I call a Kairos moment, because gratitude, weeping with joy is what I am speaking about today and she helped me with the message.

In terms of our life together, as Vista Church, important junctures in Building for God must be met, with corporate and individual celebration. In the midst of planning and praying, raising money and building we need to corporately and individually pause for moments and times of gratitude and praise.

We need to mark ground breaking, cornerstone laying, time capsule burying, fund raising milestones, mortgage burning ceremonies and consecration of new buildings. We need to mark these times with joy and celebration with deep gratitude to God for making it all possible. We need the pomp and circumstance and the ritual to express corporately and individually our gratitude to God.

Here’s some pictures of the great celebrations in the life of Vista Church. The first one is of the first permanent structure on our church property.



A white cross became the first permanent structure on the former missile site.

This cross is still there. Who are the people in it? This was 26 years ago.

Here are pictures of the groundbreaking for this worship center we are in today.



This was a later celebratory potluck.

At the end of our scripture today it says, **“No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.”**

When the ground was broken for this worship center it was news worthy enough that through Channel 4 News the sound of our joy was heard far away. Today the sound of our worshipping our joyful singing, praise and gratitude is heard around the world through our Live Streaming. Let’s see a video clip from Channel 4 News of our ground breaking. It not high definition, but it is a highlight.

Video Clip of Ground breaking.

Here are two pictures from last year of 16 years later when the mortgage was finally paid off and the building dedicated. We as UMs dedicate buildings when mortgage on them is paid. We consecrate buildings when they are first put into use.



Now “In the 2nd month of the 2nd year after their arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem...” in other words 536BC the foundation of the 2nd Temple was laid. It was 50 years after the 1st Temple was destroyed along with Jerusalem and its walls; followed by the mass deportation of its citizens. In the ancient near East the mass deportation or exile of a conquered people was a common way of controlling those who had been conquered.

50 years had passed and few were left alive who had seen the splendor of the 1st Temple. In 2009 I helped CCUM celebrate its 50th Birthday. Only about 11 of the original charter members were alive and about 6 present for that celebration. 50 years ago for us today is 1968. How many of us were alive then, and can actually remember 1968? I was 12. So those who remembered and survived wept for joy! They wept with gratitude and thanksgiving to God for doing such a marvelous thing--a remnant survived.

Gratitude is so important. Recently my wife shared with me a great quote. “**Fear and doubt cannot live with gratitude and faith.**” Say that with me. Sounds great, hopeful,... but is it true?

Diana Butler Bass pointed out a study by Dr. Dan Baden from his book, “What Happy People Know” 2003, that **“It is a fact of neurology that the brain cannot be in a state of appreciation (that’s gratitude) and a state of fear at the same time.”** The two states may alternate, but are mutually exclusive. That’s because fear and anxiety; and gratitude and appreciation use the same neuro pathway and the street is only wide enough for one vehicle at a time.

So we can fill ourselves with fear and anxiety, or praise, appreciation and gratitude. The choice is ours. We can choose what to focus on and what to deliberate on. If we choose an “attitude of gratitude” here is what it does. 1st, “It allows of celebration of the present. 2nd, “It blocks toxic emotions like (envy, resentment, regret, depression, anxiety and fear).” 3rd, “It makes us more stress resilient.” And 4th, “gratitude strengthens our social ties and self-worth.” Dr. Robert Emmons

UC Davis.

The wisdom behind the hymn “Count Your Blessing” is this an **“Attitude of Gratitude”**. When we focus on what God has given us it lifts our spirits and clears our brains. Gratitude is experienced individually and often lived out corporately. Some do better by themselves and some better in groups, but being herd animals we express gratitude, thanksgiving and praise in a deeper sense when we do it together. That is why we worship together. Which is what you see in our scripture today; and what we experience here in this room.

So, during our New Vistas Building Campaign we will pause at various places for celebrations to express our gratitude to God and for one another in our work together to see Phase 1 done. This gratitude will encourage us in our work together, and enliven us in our individual and corporate lives.

Diana Butler Bass quote studies that say **“78% of Americans have a strong feeling of gratitude every week.”** This means that for most of us gratitude comes rather naturally, but it is a talent that needs to be used to become great. So, here’s your homework this week.

Not often do I give homework, but I believe this will be fun and help you physically, mentally and spiritually. I want you to go home and look for things to be grateful for!!

When you get down or stressed or anxious change your focus. Take a moment to focus on something you are thankful for. The hard part, or fun for some, is I want you to record your experiences. What were you thankful for? When you got stressed or fearful or envious focus on Gratitude for what you do have.

I am going to do this along with you. I want you to write these things down and give them to me or email them to me. Or you can simply share them with a friend. That is the corporate nature of gratitude. When you share it gratitude it increases.

That is why we worship and celebrate together weeping, singing, clapping and sometimes even shouting Amen!!!

Thanksgiving is another word for gratitude. The words of consecration in Holy Communion are called “**The Great Thanksgiving**”. It is the corporate formal way of expressing our thanksgiving, our gratitude to God for what he has done in Jesus his son. So let us join in the sacrament of the Great Thanksgiving.