

### **Reflection “The Joy Exercise” MPruden**

As I have been introduced to the Joy exercise set by Francesca as one of my on-going tasks and self realization assignments, the placement of the exercise has taken me on a journey. And on this journey, I have had inspiration, regret, passion, anger, past trauma and past nuances and fond, and loving memories that have made me realize the person I am today. The experience has awakened me to the world I live in and have allowed myself to live in, but also the possibilities and my spiritual awareness that I am gifted with.

I was given the simple question- what brings me joy? And from there, I start the journey to explore my past from childhood to present and remember, step by step, what brought me joy in the lifetime I am living. The childhood aspect is what really is the centre to where this journey, for me, brought much happiness to the thoughts of just having childhood fun with my friends, family and other children growing up. The act of play is the first theme that I first related to as I entered and went throughout this exercise of joy.

The reason why I strongly emphasize the phrase- the act of play, is that it brought me to the theme of childhood, but also back to my mid twenties. When I was 25 years old, I was working on my university degree for drama at the University of

Alberta and in the midst of my first year of studies I lost my uncle Ralph, who died tragically in a car accident. I did everything I could to be a rock for my aunt during her time of need, as well as keep up with my full-time studies. I quickly burnt out. So, my program advisor gave me some grace and had me connect with an elder, who became a strong spiritual teacher and inspiration to me. Through my elder, I learned like a child again of our ways culturally and spiritually. She saw the spiritual strength and wisdom in me and wanted me to build those gifts. But at the same time, she taught me the best message that I always keep as a tool of inspiration and leadership to this day.

We held a feast for my uncle a few months after his funeral and a few days before the feast, I sat and did the pipe ceremony with my elder. She told me that I will receive a beautiful and very important message at the feast from my uncle, accept it and we will smoke the pipe again after some time from the feast and explore that message. And so, I followed my elders' instructions and paid attention to what I saw, felt and participated in at my uncle's feast.

A few days later I met with my elder and we did the pipe ceremony once again to recap my experience at the feast. She only asked me one question- what did you see that caught your eye? And I answered her. I walked to the living room

window at my aunts' home, where the feast was and I looked outside. And as I looked outside I saw a little chickadee on the windowsill, sitting and singing and looking back at me. After a while and after I took full notice of the bird, it flew away, and that was it.

My elder, after taking a few puffs of the pipe gave me an answer to my experience. The chickadee was my uncle in spirit form, he came to me to give me a message. My elder then asked me a question- what do you think of when you see a chickadee? I replied- a chickadee reminds of a child and of things that are playful. And without hesitation my elder agreed- that's all that you need to know. She continued- your uncle came to you as a chickadee because a chickadee is playful, just how your uncle was in his life, and that is what your uncle wants you to be once again in your life, playful like a child. If one cannot be playful like a child in their life, they can't create, they can't grow, they can't love, and one can't learn the gifts of life that the Creator has given them. Be creative Murray, in your work and studies and everywhere you can in your life, be playful like a child once again.

So, with this advice from my elder and from my uncle, I was able to refocus on my studies, enter the world of theatre and live my life in a positive way again. This

story is a reminder of the joy that I once again need to find in my life. The road and many doors that Francesca has now introduced me to again at this point in my life is a rekindle of the circle of life that we as humans live and relive on this learning path of life. I see the many struggles in my life and I also see the many positive opportunities as well and with the tools and new formed exercises that Francesca is willing to guide me through, will indeed help bring foundation, a sense of balanced mentality and structure that is needed in the field of studies and work I anticipate in the near future. I believe that the Creator has given me a living guardian today to help me through this energetic field of organic combustion we call life, and that is Francesca Murray. I no longer feel that I walk alone in this physical world, as I know that I never walk alone in the spiritual world. The Joy exercise and the journal work that I have gradually been progressing at has started me on a healing journey and a rekindling of my truth, my spirit and my path to where, who and why I am on this path in life as a Cree man, that is two spirited and realizing that I have more strength and good medicine within and around me that I never knew was capable.

“But Christian hope is not limited to the fulfillment of individual life. It insists that personal and communal fulfillment are inseparable. Christians thus work and

hope for the transformation of life in community. As individuals, we know that our lives are intimately intertwined with those of friends and neighbors near and far. When by grace we rise above our egocentricity, we realize that there can be no salvation for us as persons apart from the transformation of the many communities and institutions to which we belong: family, society, humanity as a whole. The expansion of Christian hope to include new life for societies and economies ruled by the power of death has been a major contribution of political and liberation theologies in our time. If our hope is in the triune God, it must necessarily be a hope not of the salvation of isolated individuals but of people in community.”<sup>1</sup>.

People need to realize to have truth in their lives, one should ask for forgiveness. But once that act of forgiveness occurs, then the movement toward change should occur. If that change doesn’t happen, then the forgiveness hasn’t occurred as well. It’s a hard process because people fear positive change. As it says in the Old Testament, “But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.” (Psalm 130:4)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Migliore, Daniel L. Faith Seeking Understanding- An Introduction to Christian Theology. 3rd Edition. Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014. Page 357

<sup>2</sup> May, Herbert G Editor. The New Oxford Annotated Bible. New York, Oxford University Press, 1973. Page 757

God has made us all as unique individuals and creations of this world. God has the all knowing as to each one of our abilities and sensations as beings of light and energy. God does not make mistakes, it is only man who has defined the word “mistake”, so we only dictate ourselves and our livelihood in that unfortunate definition. In Psalm 139: 13-14 it states “For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well”<sup>3</sup>. We should leave the mystery of God to God and let the concept of mistake to God, because God has made each creation a worthwhile intention.

The church is a foundation of the people, accepting the word of Jesus as teacher and guide to God’s unconditional love. As it states in Isaiah 56: 6-7 “And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD

to minister to Him,

to love the name of the LORD,

and to be His servants—

all who keep the Sabbath without profaning it

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<sup>3</sup> <https://biblehub.com/bsb/psalms/139.htm>

and who hold fast to My covenant—

I will bring them to My holy mountain

and make them joyful in My house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices

will be accepted on My altar,

for My house will be called a house of prayer

for all the nations.”<sup>4</sup>

God wants all nations, people, those that are different from one another to accept him by their ways and that is celebrated in our way as Christians in the church, which is a place of worship but more profoundly, a people of different lifestyles and cultures and ways of living to celebrate and love God and one another through the gift of Jesus Christ. A church where all are different but are the same in the eyes of God and within the Christian faith, a people of light and commitment to the celebration of life and love.

As a people of love, the way Jesus has taught us to be, we commit that message as a Christian family of the church. As it states in 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8 “Love is

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<sup>4</sup> <https://biblehub.com/bsb/isaiah/56.htm>

patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no account of wrongs. Love takes no pleasure in evil but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be restrained; where there is knowledge, it will be dismissed. For we know in part and we prophesy in part”<sup>5</sup>.

The church teaches us to love one another, to give good measure to our neighbors. In other words, treat others as you would want to be treated. Jesus says it best in Luke 10: 30-37 “Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. “And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. “Likewise, a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. “But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. “On the next day he took out two

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<sup>5</sup> [https://biblehub.com/bsb/1\\_corinthians/13.htm](https://biblehub.com/bsb/1_corinthians/13.htm)



denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you.' "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."<sup>6</sup> Compassion and humility as people of the Christian family announces the ideals that we as a church community should and shall welcome all who enter the house of God.

Sexual identity and same sex families today still plays as a taboo in much of rural Alberta communities and yes, the Christian church. As it states in Romans 14: 1-4 "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on his opinions. For one man has faith to eat all things, while another, who is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not belittle the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand"<sup>7</sup>. We place judgement of what we believe is the truth of God or what should be the given truth of God. Acceptance of all creations is a must as a

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<sup>6</sup> <https://biblehub.com/bsb/luke/10.htm>

<sup>7</sup> <https://biblehub.com/bsb/romans/14.htm>

Christian, but we tend to limit that acceptance because we fear the unknown. I would like to share some reflection of my experience as a person who identifies as LGBTQ+ person. And how I placed patterns of limited belief and conditioning of myself and my sexuality.

I believe one of the greatest patterns and limit that I have conditioned myself to be is my sexuality. For most of my life I kept my private life, well, private. I felt the familial constitution and obligation to be seen heterosexual was my priority as taught by my family upbringing to hold fast to, for the wellbeing of the image of our family and our conditioning within society and community. For much of my life, I sacrificed my self identity to show the world that myself and my family are good and great people. One thing I was taught by my elder was that I do have an obligation as part of a tribal chief leader. Yes, as a leader of a people, I have been told I hold a place in the circle of chiefs. But this position I will continue to learn my presentation as a leader. There is a difference from being a person of society and being officiated as part of society. My elder told me that I always must look the part when I leave my home, my sanctuary from the world and community. At home I can be anything I want but as a leader I must retain that self gratification and lead people with balance. So today I am continuing to learn that teaching

because now I realize that my elder was telling me more than upholding family obligations and images but to centre myself and be myself to others as a leader, and realize my identity of truly what and whom I am. Not a show for others to see but a testimony and light energy that I am. By taking the time to return to my path in life and to journal and speak more open with my mentor, I have revisited parts of my life that “bring me down” or stress me out and basically made me feel alone. And by talking and journaling these moments with my mentor, she has given me the ability to question those emotions. And at the same time, these emotions influence my body and my body, as an empath, vibrate to the energy. And sometimes this energy can and does make me sick or ill. Going through that physical journey throughout my sessions and time with my mentors training and guidance has provided me a realization that I connect on a different level than most people. And we all have our connections to energy on different levels and that proves we have a lesson in life that we learn from each other, though we end up on the same journey. All this has given me more ideas to becoming a minister and a person of Theological thought. I am a person of the spirit, I think I believe that before I say that I am a Cree or a Christian, because my spirit is what fills this body and mind. The ideas that I have realized doing my exercises and reflection in my journals and training is that I have created the Joy and the Fear in my life, the

world reflects that dual. That I cannot have lived without both of these in my life to help me understand who I am, they are both blessings to me. And today, without regret, though I may not have come out to my entire family of my sexuality, without taking the small steps with and continue to embark with the guidance from my mentor, I can lovingly state that I am a beautiful, loving Cree, two-spirited, spiritual leading and gentle man. My name is Wolf of Gentle Rivers. I am gifted. And I am here to learn of this world, but also to change and lead it. I continue to write when I see fit of the experiences, both good and bad of the life I live, and I thank God for all of that she has placed in my life.

So, let us as all people of Christian faith accept each other as neighbours and part of the same church family, whether we are a gay couple with a family to raise, or a person of race, ethnicity, old, young, physically or mentally challenged, we are the church together. We create the community that we want to live in, but if we create the community with closed eyes and hearts, I sense that one is not really following the spiritual and moral teachings of Jesus and the truth of love from God. Acceptance is hard but can be achieved when we see the world and all of God's creations as what God has made us to be, his truth.

It is time to let go.

Time to let go of the past,

My past, the past that doesn't exist anymore.

But, more importantly,

It is time the past let's go of me.

I have made wonderful steps

To my future, to good and

Blessed things in my life. And,

I need to continue to dance that path,

Embrace my continuous song,

Move forward and on with my life.

God, Spirit that is Holy,

Jesus, my friend.

It is time to let go.

It is time to help me move forward,

with the love and grace,

and wonder that is my life.

Love and bless me.

Empower me greatly.

Thank you. Amen.