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A reporter randomly asked people on the streets about their experience with the morning, about getting up first thing in the day. She asked, “What comes in the morning for you?” Among the replies, the reporter heard:

- Coffee. I need my coffee before I can begin my day.
- Anticipation and excitement, for I look forward to what awaits me.
- Fatigue. I never get enough sleep, and then the day starts all over again.
- My dog licking my face for me to get up and feed him.
- Bird songs as I sit outside and listen to the sounds of nature.
- Fear. I don’t know what the day will bring, and with all the violence in our community, I wonder if I’ll make it through another day.
- Joy. I’m grateful for another day to wake up and live.

Any of those morning experiences sound familiar to you? How does your day begin? What comes in the morning?

The writer of Psalm 30 suggested that joy comes in the morning, but the writer also recognized that this joyful emotion doesn’t come easily, for the psalmist began by expressing fear and anxiety. The writer named two struggles for which he cried out for help—first, against enemies, and second, in the face of death, possibly the result of an illness.

One might be tempted to interpret this psalm simplistically, thinking that if you pray long enough, everything will turn out ok as we strive to manipulate God to do what we want. I think, however, that the writer reflects a deeper theological notion—that one can give thanks even when facing the struggles of life. If you read a bit further in the psalm, verse 7 suggests that God’s face was hidden from the writer, creating a sense of dismay and loneliness. How could the writer speak of joy in such a time of isolation?

When you toss and turn in the middle of the night, struggling with illness or faced with the fear of enemies, do you expect joy in the morning? Most of us don’t experience the fear of enemies like those living in war-torn parts of the world, but I imagine you have faced the fear of someone ridiculing you, or

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the fear of someone criticizing you for a project you spent many hours doing.

Maybe you have felt the fear of an illness, of a diagnosis that made you wonder how long you might live. The recent coronavirus evoked fear in many of us, prompting us to remain isolated in our homes for what seemed a very long time. We may have hidden our feelings behind our masks, but rumbling deep within us a sense of vulnerability stirred inside, making us more aware of the reality of death.

If you can recall those feelings, I think we catch a glimpse of how the psalmist was feeling as he wrote:

Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.

Did you notice the psalm doesn't get stuck with fear and weeping? Although the writer starts out with a lament, the words suddenly morph to joy. One commentary noticed the shift using one tiny word:

This little word “but” creates a contrast between what was and what will be; it does not deny the reality of suffering, nor does it minimize the power of hope. Even through the night of weeping, we know that sadness does not have the last word. God does, and it is a word of grace, hope, and joy.¹

But...that's a word that Protestant reformer Thomas Becon² probably knew a lot about. He was born in the early 1500s in England, attended college, and began preaching.

But...he was arrested at the age of 29 for preaching radical ideas during the Protestant Reformation when the church was going through a challenging time of change, so he began writing under a fictitious name.

But...when a new king came to power when Becon was 36, he was appointed as a chaplain and could speak freely again.

But...when Becon was 42, a new ruler came to power and he was stripped of his religious standing and imprisoned once again.

But...Becon was released the following year and fled to safety, found new opportunities to teach, and eventually became a respected religious leader.

He wrote the words we used at the beginning of our worship, a prayer inviting us to love others as we live in ways that reflect Jesus' teachings. It's sometimes difficult to love when we're faced with the challenges of living, the struggles of day-to-day life.

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Have you ever tried to do something nice, received negative feedback, and then agonized about it throughout the night? How many restless nights might it take to discover joy in the morning?

In 1958, 17-year-old Robert Heft received a poor grade for a school assignment, but rather than be discouraged, the “B-” inspired him to try harder, resulting in something most of us will see this weekend during our Fourth of July celebrations. His teacher had given the class a project—to design a new flag for our nation. Robert expected that Alaska and Hawaii might soon become states, which would make the 48-star American flag obsolete. He used his mother’s sewing machine, spending 12 hours with a yardstick to carefully lay out 50 stars on each side of the blue background of an old 48-star flag.

The teacher suggested, however—and I imagine in a joking way—that if Congress accepted his flag design, the teacher would change the grade to an “A.” Robert submitted his design, and imagine his surprise when he received a personal phone call from President Eisenhower, telling him his design had been selected from among 1500 submissions to be the next flag of the United States! Needless to say, the school assignment grade was changed to an “A.”³ So...

- When others tell you it can’t be done;
- when you hear words of criticism and scorn;
- when all seems lost;
- when you struggle through a restless night...remember...
- God remains with you, and
- Joy comes in the morning!

¹ Donna Giver-Johnston, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship*, Year 3, Vol. 3.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Becon#Further_reading

³ http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2010-07-02/news/bs-md-backstory-1960-flag-20100702_1_48-star-flag-blue-canton-fort-mchenry