JOY FOREVER (Mk. 2: 1 8-20)

WE ARE THE CHURCH! WE ARE GOD'S OWN PEOPLE! WE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST! EVEN MORE THAN THAT, WE ARE THE BRIDE OF CHRIST. CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT IT IS GOING TO BE LIKE WHEN OUR BRIDEGROOM RETURNS, RIDING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN WITH ALL OF HIS HOLY ANGELS -- THOUSANDS UPON THOUSANDS OF THEM -- SINGING WITH THEIR LOUD VOICES: *WORTHY IS THE LAMB WHO WAS SLAIN TO RECEIVE POWER & WEALTH & WISDOM & STRENGTH & HONOR & GLORY & PRAISE*? CAN YOU IMAGINE WE ARE ALL GOING TO BE EXPERIENCING? ..... YOU CANNOT MANUFACTURE JOY. WE AMERICANS ARE PROBABLY THE GREATEST IN ALL OF HISTORY IN MANUFACTURING PLEASURE. PLEASURE STIMULATES THE SENSES! BUT NO MATTER HOW HARD WE MAY TRY, WE CANNOT MANUFACTURE JOY! C.S.LEWIS WAS ONCE ASKED TO DEFINE JOY. HE SAID, I CANNOT DESCRIBE IT. IF YOU HAVE HAD IT, I DON'T HAVE TO. IF YOU HAVE NEVER HAD IT, I CAN'T DESCRIBE IT. J O Y HAPPENED WHEN MY CHILDREN RESPONDED TO THE SOUND OF MY VOICE WHEN THEY WEE LYING IN THEIR CRIBS. J O Y HAPPENED WHEN MY GRANDSON LOOKED UP AT ME & SAID, GRAMPA, YOU ARE MY BUDDIE!..... WHEN MARY ANN & I WERE MARRIED [~~PLEASE GOD, FORGIVE US. THIS IS OUR 2ND MARRIAGE. CREATE IN US CLEAN HEARTS & RIGHT SPIRITS~~] WE STOOD BEFORE THE ALTAR & THE PASTOR PREACHED ON HELMUT THIELICKE'S FAMOUS PHRASE: YOU CAN BEGIN AGAIN! WE HELD EACH OTHER'S HANDS AS WE SPOKE OUR WEDDING VOWS & THE TEARS WERE STREAMING DOWN MARY ANN'S CHEEKS. WHEN THE SERVICE WAS OVER, WE WALKED DOWN THE AISLE & WENT OUTSIDE & THERE WAS THIS GORGEOUS RAINBOW IN FRONT OF US. MY THOUGHTS WENT TO JOHN'S GOSPEL"THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS & THE DARKNESS HAS NEVER PUT IT OUT. FOR US GOD WAS SAYING,YES, YOU CAN BRGIN AGAIN. JESUS HAS DRAWN US CLOSER & CLOSER TOGETHER ER THAT WE MIGHT SHOW FORTH HIS LOVE & CARING FOR OTHERS..... WE ARE TOLD HERE THAT JOHN THE BAPTIST'S DISCIPLES & THE PHARISEES WERE ALL FASTING & PEOPLE CAME TO JESUS & ASKED, WHY DON'T YOU & YOUR DISCIPLES FAST TOO? JESUS

ANSWERED, CAN THE WEDDING GUESTS FAST WHILE THE BRIDEGROOM IS WITH THEM? THEN HE WENT OUT TO SAY, THE DAY WILL COME WHEN THE BRIDEGROOM IS TAKEN AWAY FROM THEM & THEN THEY WILL FAST. AS MARTIN LUTHER WOULD SAY, FASTING & BODILY PREPARATION ARE INDEED A FINE OUTWARD TRAINING.... REMEMBER WHEN JESUS BEGAN HIS MINISTRY, HE WENT OUT INTO THE WILDERNESS & FASTED FOR 40 DAYS & 40 NIGHTS, HIS PURPOSE WAS TO DRAW HIMSELF CLOSER & CLOSER TO HIS HEAVENLY FATHER. THEN THE TEMPTER CAME TOLD HIM THAT IF HE REALLY WERE THE SON OF GOD, HE COULD THE STONES INTO BREAD. JESUS LOOKED SATAN STRAIGHT IN THE EYE & SAID, MAN DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT BY EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD HIMSELF..... DO YOU BEGIN TO SEE WHY DEBBIE HEATON IS ASKING US TO PARTICIPATE IN A 30 HR. FAST & JOIN IN A PRAYER VIGIL FOR ALL THE NEEDY & HUNGRY CHILDREN IN NICARAGUA WHO LIVE BY THE GARBAGE DUMPS & GO TO BED HUNGRY EVERY NIGHT. FASTING IS A WAY OF HUMBLING ONESELF & EMPTYING ONESELF IN ORDER TO BECOME FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT. ST. PAUL REFERRED TO FASTING A WAY OF BRINGING HIS BODY INTO SUBJECTION THAT THE POWER OF XP MIGHT REST UPON HIM. I'M SURE WE HAVE ALL HEARD THE AXIOM: NO CROSS, NO CROWN! JESUS WENT THROUGH BITTER SUFFERINGS & EVEN DEATH -- BUT NOT EVEN DEATH COULD HOLD HIM! ON THE 3RD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN! THAT IS WHY WE HAVE THIS STAINED GLASS CROSS WITH ALL THE COLORS OF THE RAINBOW THAT WE MIGHT REMEMBER WHAT THE WRITER TO THE HEBREWS PROCLAIMS: FOR THE JOY THAT WAS SET BEFORE HIM, XP ENDURED THE CROSS, DESPISING THE SHAME. CAN YOU EVEN BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THE GREAT PRICE JESUS PAID THAT YOU & I MIGHT BE HIS BRIDE? ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO HIS RETURN? JOHN IN REV.: I SAW THE HOLY CITY, THE NEW JERUSALEM, COMING DOWN OUT OF HEAVEN FROM GOD, PREPARED AS A BRIDE BEAUTIFULLY DRESSED FOR HER HUSBAND. GOD HIMSELF WILL WIPE EVERY TEAR FROM THEIR EIR EYES. THERE WILL BE NO MORE DEATH ORMOURNING CRYING OR PAIN, FOR THE OLD ORDER OF THINGS HAS PASSED AWAY