What shall we celebrate today? What’s the occasion? Christ is risen, you are breathing, the sun came up again this morning, you can read — take your pick! How could you and I as Christians ever truly run out of things to celebrate?

In the eyes of the world, are we celebrators or wet blankets? The empty tomb we commemorate on Easter morning means we have more to celebrate than anyone! Why then are we so often characterized as rigid and somber? I can’t help but join in on Teresa of Avila’s prayer, “From silly devotions and sour-faced saints, spare us, O Lord.” For the fruit of the Spirit is duty, judgment, enforcement — wait — that’s not our mandate, is it? Love and joy head that list!

I fear our notion of celebration is like a bunch of stoic old people at a tennis match, clapping and saying, “Very good. Most enlivening.” Shouldn’t it be like a two-year-old who has just had the entire box of Honey Nut Cheerios dumped out in front of her — wide-eyed and open-mouth astonished at the sheer abundance that is ours in Christ Jesus?

Engaging in celebration is inherently communal. The Latin root of celebration means “to assemble to honor” which indicates that, for celebration to occur, some assembly is required. We need each other’s presence to celebrate. Leviticus 23 records seven feasts for the Israelites to celebrate on an annual basis. The first of these feasts is Passover which we celebrate each time we come to the Lord’s table together. This is a time for confession to be sure, but most certainly for celebration as well! We celebrate that our confessions are heard and our sins are forgiven because of the price Jesus paid for us at Calvary.

After a long Lenten season of waiting, the Son has risen with the sun, and because of his incredible valor and sacrifice, the veil has been torn in two, death has lost its sting, and we can be adopted as God’s beloved children. Shall we party like it’s 1999 or like we’ve got eternity in paradise before us?

Go forth as an ambassador of joy and celebration! What this lost world needs is not a measuring stick, but an invitation to experience the Master’s house party.
Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run;
Shake off dull sloth, and early rise
To pay thy morning sacrifice.

Redeem thy mis-spent time that’s past,
Live this day as if ‘twere thy last;
’T’improve thy talents take due care
‘Gainst the great day thy self prepare.

Glory to God, who save hath kept;
And hath refresh’d me while I slept;
Grant, Lord, when I from death shall wake,
I may of endless life partake.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heav’nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

SPiritual Practices

• Find ways to intentionally build celebratory elements into your Sabbath practices. It doesn’t need to be a big production, but what could you do that would feel celebratory?

• Invite God to broaden your view of celebration and joy in the kingdom of heaven. Could you dare to envision the celebration that took place in heaven on the day that you were the lost coin that was found (yes, this happened!)?

• Imagine you are on the hospitality and promotion team for the wedding feast from Matthew 22. How winsome is your personal invitation to come and join the party? Are others drawn to the party because you are going?

• Do you experience God as a taskmaster or a party thrower?

• Can you personally receive God’s celebration of you in the words of Zephaniah 3:17b that he delights in you and rejoices over you with singing?

• Would you consider celebration to be a spiritual discipline? If so, how will you practice it?

• What in your life is worth celebrating that you have perhaps overlooked?

• When is your next celebration, and who will it be with?

REFlection Questions

A Prayer of Illumination:
Let joy abound and celebration ensue, Father, as we survey your goodness to us in countless ways. Comfort us in our suffering and embolden us in our celebrating. Jesus, continue to seek and reclaim what’s been lost along the way — in our world and in our own hearts. Amen.

Suggested Spiritual Formation Resources

Celebration of Discipline, by Richard Foster
The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants, by Kenneth Bailey