

Joy in the Lord

Philippians 4: 1-9

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The man was waiting behind a tree as he watched the family slowly pack the car with all their vacation supplies and finally pull away for their summer vacation. The man waited until it was dark, and when he thought it was safe he went to the front door and rang the doorbell. When there was no answer, the seasoned burglar picked the lock and was inside the house. As a precaution, he yelled out, 'is anyone home?' He was stunned that he heard a voice reply, "I see you and so does Jesus."

The burglar was terrified and called out, "Who's there?" Again the voice called out, "I see you and so does Jesus." The burglar then switched on his flashlight and walked into the direction of the voice to find to his relief a caged parrot who recited again, "I see you and so does Jesus." He laughed to himself and walked to the wall and turned on the wall switch. Then he saw it. Beneath the parrot's cage was a Doberman Pinscher. The parrot then said, "Sic 'em' Jesus"!

The mind of Christ: It is good to tell a joke. It has been said that Joy that comes from laughter is like 'medicine to the soul'. This joy quickly evaporates, however, when there is an unhealthy difference of opinion. We think of the two women in our reading for today – Euodia and Syntyche who were experiencing conflict with one another. Paul was urging them 'to be of the same mind' in the Lord. What does Paul mean by this 'same mind'? One could say this means to share Jesus' perspective; His purpose; and his plan for the world. In Philippians 2: 3-4, Paul states, ***"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves, Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others, let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."*** We are to humble ourselves as Christ had humbled himself. In our world today, we do not seem to speak with one another in a humble way. We see this more recently in politics, where the leader's point of view seems to be the only thing that is important, and the one holding the opposing view is easily demonized. Polarity in views is more emphasized today, where commonality is diminished. A humble conversation involves listening and dialoguing with respect for the other. When we build bridges with others as Christ did, the conflict will naturally decrease and the joy will increase!

Disagreements are a part of life. How we deal with our differences in opinion will determine whether discussion builds unity or division in the body of Christ. Healthy, humble dialogue over disagreements can actually make us stronger if we rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The goal of dialogue in addressing disagreements is not to change another's mind on the subject, but rather to display humble love and respect for the other; to become more aware of why the other person has that opinion, and knowing that the other has the honest desire to do the right thing just as you do. Paul wanted the joy these two women had for one another to be restored.

In Philippians 4:4, Paul says, ***"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!"*** Paul truly wants this message to get through to his readers, so he repeats himself in a command-like fashion. Some of you may be thinking at this moment that it is easy for Paul to say that. It is easy to say 'rejoice' when times are good, but not so easy when times are bad. Those who are wrestling with addictions, for example, and are frustrated that they just can't stop, find it hard to rejoice. One could come to the opinion that Paul's advice is overly simplistic and sounds like the saying 'don't worry be happy'.

Paul's Context: Was Paul's life that good that it was easy for him to command people to be joyful? Let's look at what was going on in his life. As Paul was writing he was in a dark, musty prison cell. He

was dealing with the pressures and struggles associated with being in prison. He was also responsible for the various churches in the region and beyond. He was concerned about teaching that was not consistent with Christ's message. He was also dealing with conflict in the church as we just mentioned. He was working in a culture which was hostile to Christianity. The point I am making here is that Paul was certainly not writing from a place where everything was good. In spite of his hardships, Paul was saying, "Rejoice in the Lord".

In our lives in our affluent west, we can find a number of life joys and disappointments on a daily basis. We love it when our favourite sports team has won. That can give us lift for a few hours. The joy from that can be short-lived when we notice a parking ticket on our car. Later you return home to have your spirits lifted because you find a substantial unexpected refund cheque from the government. Then you go to the basement to find a flood in your laundry room because of a serious plumbing problem. Your joy is robbed again! We can go up and down a few times all in the same day. One can become quite cynical when they experience life like an up and down yo-yo.

When joy is rooted in faith: The joy Paul was experiencing came from the Lord. When we reflect on the fruit of the Spirit as found in Galatians 5: 22, we know for starters that God's nature reflects all the fruit: **"...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."** When Paul says, 'Rejoice in the Lord always', the joy he is referring to is not motivated by outside circumstance. It is implanted in Paul's heart through faith in Christ. His joy comes from God and is planted in his heart. Whatever negative, joyless forces are on the outside, the presence of God and the hope for the future sustained Paul and even gave him joy.

Practicing God's joy within: The command to 'Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say rejoice' does not mean you rejoice and give thanks only when you are feeling good or life is going your way. If our rejoicing only happened when happy and fulfilled, faith would have a diminished part in initiating joy in our lives. A more consistent, joyful life comes from the knowledge of God's presence and God's guidance around us. Regular worship attendance helps to put us in the habit of regularly 'rejoicing in the Lord' regardless of our circumstances that week.

Practice God's Joy through Prayer: Worry robs us of joy. Paul states in Philippians 4: 6 not to worry about anything. How is that possible? I think concerns are important, but worry is detrimental because it is based in fear. I John 4: 18 states that we are not to be afraid because perfect love (from God) casts out fear. When we do worry, however, Paul's words in our scripture say, in effect, that we are to turn those worries into prayer. In other words, when you feel a worry coming on, start praying! In this prayer we are to ask God to help us, but also to remember to give thanks for the good things in our lives when you feel a worry coming on.

Practice through thinking about good things: Have you ever had a hard time sleeping and your loved one suggested that you think about lovely things? I certainly have done that. Paul says that whatever is honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent and anything worthy of praise, think about these things. This is a form of thanksgiving which lifts our spirits.

May your mind be filled with the good things from God. Be of the same mind as Christ – let your joy in the Lord be with you as you talk with one another in spite of sometimes not seeing eye to eye on the issues at hand. Continue to rejoice, tell jokes, celebrate, turning your worries into prayers knowing that God is near. Amen.