

Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church

“Joy”

Scripture: Philippians 4:2-7; Isaiah 12:2-6; Luke 3:7-18

Hymns: Hope is a candle (vs 4/5 insert following responsive call to worship); Joyful, joyful we adore you 410; Rejoice in the Lord 421; I’m gonna shout, shout (insert from More Voices 183); Hail to the Lord’s Anointed 115

November 29

Rev. Steve Filyk

“Rejoice in the Lord always;  
Again I will say, Rejoice.”

And you’re thinking

“Rejoice?”

Well let me tell you a little about my week.”

“I just found out our company will be going through

Yet another round of layoffs.

Forget Christmas bonuses.

Once again I need to prove my worth.”

Or...

“This week I moved my father-in-law

Into a senior’s care facility.

He didn’t want to go.

He was crying when I left.”

Or...

“Yesterday my son said he was feeling ill.

Last night they rushed him to the hospital.

They’ve done a whole battery of tests

But we’re still waiting to find out what’s wrong.”

“Rejoice in the Lord always” Paul commands us.

And you’re thinking,

“Not today.

Today I’ve got too many troubles on my mind.”

Of course if you consider the situation of Paul

Or the situation of the people he was writing to

You’ll realise that neither he nor his audience

Were experiencing particularly sunny days.

At the time of this writing, Paul is imprisoned.

“Many scholars believe Paul wrote Philippians in Rome

just about the time Nero began tossing Christians

to ravenous lions

and burning them as torches

to illuminate his banquets.”<sup>i</sup>

But if Paul was in danger

Then so was the church he planted at Philippi.

Aside from those threats from the Empire

There were doctrinal dogs nipping at faithful feet,

Trying to steal the grace they had discovered.

Then there were divisions within:

Two faithful leaders, Euodia and Syntyche,

Were turning interpersonal issues

Into congregational ones.<sup>ii</sup>

Paul and the church at Philippi are facing difficult circumstances.

And yet Paul is surprisingly joyful.

And he calls the church to rejoice.

So how are we to understand this?

I think it is important to first of all

Differentiate joy from happiness.

One writer notes that:

“Happiness is based upon “happenings,”

meaning if things happen to go well, you’re happy,

but if it happens that something bad occurs

then [happiness disappears].”<sup>iii</sup>

Psychologists understand happiness  
As rooted in “drive reduction.

If you have a need or a desire -- like hunger -- you satisfy it,  
and that makes you happy.  
People become happy...  
when they get what they want.<sup>iv</sup>

But is there a sort of peace and gladness  
That exists apart from our circumstances?  
The is independent of good ‘happenings’  
Or always getting what we want?

I think there is.  
I think that this is what Paul is talking about  
When he calls us to rejoice.

I ran across this poetic description  
That seems to encapsulate the difference  
Between joy and happiness:

“Joy is not a feeling in response to a fortunate event.  
That is happiness; and it fades away  
as quickly as the happy situation passes.

Joy is not a momentary response to love or sky or water.  
That is happiness; and it disappears when love is gone  
or the sky turns gray or the water hardens into ice.

No, Joy is a condition of spirit  
which so fills my being  
that no amount of unhappiness can cast it out.

Happiness and unhappiness are feelings in my heart.  
But Joy and the absence of Joy are conditions of my whole being.  
Happiness and unhappiness have causes.  
Joy comes to pass.<sup>v</sup>

I like this description, but have trouble with the end.  
Are we simply just to wait for joy to show up,  
To simply come to pass?

While joy may not have immediate causes like happiness  
I think joy is connected with other parts of our living.  
And if we trust the words of Scripture,  
Joy has a definite and particular root.

Just consider today’s passage...

Paul calls the Philippians to ‘Rejoice’,  
And then he immediately moves on to talk  
About specific behavior connected to  
The different relationships in each of our lives.

*“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.  
Let your gentleness be known to everyone.”*

Running these sentences together  
Implies that joy is somehow connected  
to our attitude towards others.

What is translated as ‘gentleness’ in the NRSV  
Is in other translations  
described as ‘consideration’ and ‘magnanimity’.<sup>vi</sup>

Paul seems to connect joy with how we treat others.

*“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.  
Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.  
Do not worry about anything”*

Do not worry about anything.  
In his writing Paul also connects joy to our internal world  
And how we manage the pressures and possibilities.

Do we see the future as foreboding or full of promise?  
Do we hold on to our worries or let them go?

Paul connects joy with anxiety  
And our ability to cast it off, to sent it packing.

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.  
 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.  
 Do not worry about anything,  
 but in everything by prayer and supplication  
 with thanksgiving  
 let your requests be made known to  
 God.”*

Let your requests be made known to God.  
 Joy is finally linked with the conversations we have with our Maker.  
 We are encouraged to come to God in our neediness,  
 Both making requests and offering thanks.

Paul connects joy with prayer.

But if Paul connects joy with our attitudes towards others,  
 With anxiety, and with prayer,  
 Paul ultimately roots joy in the presence,  
 the nearness of Christ.

Paul speaks of rejoicing ‘in the Lord’.  
 And he also notes emphatically  
 That “The Lord is near.”

Earlier on in his letter (the second chapter of Philippians)  
 Paul quotes what is likely an early hymn  
 That recounts the extraordinary  
 And surprising work of God in Jesus.

“How Jesus had equal status with God  
 but didn’t cling to that status..  
 and when the time came,  
 set aside the privileges of deity and became human!

How he lived a selfless, obedient life  
 and then died a selfless, obedient death

And then how God lifted him high  
 and honored him far beyond anyone or anything.”<sup>vii</sup>

Paul references this hymn  
 to show that God can take even the darkest moment in history  
 and turn it to good.

The cross, and Jesus’ not staying dead,  
 [which is confirmed by Jesus’ present nearness]  
 proves that nothing is powerful enough  
 to stamp [out our gladness and peace].<sup>viii</sup>

As I noted earlier “Happiness is based upon “happenings,”  
 meaning if things happen to go well, you’re happy,  
 but if it happens that something bad occurs  
 then you’re happiness is likely gone.”<sup>ix</sup>

Our joy is rooted in God’s triumphant work in Jesus  
 That is confirmed by Jesus’ presence with us,  
 That teaches us that in all things,  
 good *ultimately* wins.

This knowledge is the abiding source of Christian joy.  
 And it is a joy that is within reach  
 Of all of us  
 no matter our circumstance.

As I was reading through various articles in preparation  
 For this Sunday’s sermon  
 I came across this testimony  
 that one writer gave of her mother  
 And the joy she witnessed in her mother’s life.

Listen to her story:  
 “My mother had a lot of joy  
 and I learned from watching her joy.

Her pathological man ran off with her life savings  
 forcing her to work well past retirement.  
 It forced her to live simply  
 so moved to a one room beach shack  
 and drove a motorcycle...

She drank cheap grocery store wine that came in a box,  
 bought her clothes from thrift shops,  
 and made beach totes  
 from crocheting plastic grocery bags together.

She recycled long before it was hip to do it.  
 But what she recycled most and best was pain....into joy.

Instead of looking externally for yet another relationship  
 to remove the sting of the last one,  
 or to conquer the boredom she might feel at being alone...  
 she cultivated internal and deep abiding joy.

It was both an enigma and a privilege  
 to watch this magnificent life  
 emerge from the ashes of great betrayal...

Women flocked to her to ask 'How did you do it?  
 How did you shed the despair and bitterness  
 of what he did and grow into this?

THIS bright shining joyful person? What is your secret?'

Somewhere along that rocky path of broken relationships...  
 she learned that happiness is fleeting  
 if it's tied to a man's shirt tails...

The transitory things of life are happiness-based.  
 She had a big house  
 and lost a big house when she divorced my father.

She had a big career  
 and lost a big career when she got 'too old'  
 according to our culture  
 to have the kind of job she had.

She had diamonds and lost diamonds.

So she entered into voluntary simplicity  
 where the fire of purging away 'stuff'  
 left a clearer picture and path to the internal life...

When you need nothing more than your truth  
 and the love of a good God to bring peace,  
 then you have settled into the abiding joy  
 that is not rocked by relationships.

It's not rocked by anything."<sup>x</sup>

May we discover this abiding joy  
 that our good God offers us in Jesus.  
 And may we rejoice in the Lord always.  
 Amen.

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i Philip Yancey and Tim Stafford "Cheerful Sounds from a Jail Cell" *The Student Bible* NIV 1036  
 ii See Allen Hilton "Philippians 4:4-7; Exegetical Perspective" *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word - Year C, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration*.  
 iii Jack Wellman "What Is The Difference Between Joy And Happiness In The Bible?" August 22, 2015 Patheos [www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/08/22/what-is-the-difference-between-joy-and-happiness-in-the-bible/](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/08/22/what-is-the-difference-between-joy-and-happiness-in-the-bible/)  
 iv Emily Esfahani Smith "There's more to life than being happy" *The Atlantic* January 9, 2013 [www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/01/theres-more-to-life-than-being-happy/266805/?single\\_page=true](http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/01/theres-more-to-life-than-being-happy/266805/?single_page=true)  
 v "Joy" <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~parkx032/XP88.html>  
 vi See Philip E. Campbell "Philippians 4:4-7; Pastoral Perspective" *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word - Year C, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration*.

vii Paraphrase of Philippians 2:5-11 MSG  
 viii The Philip Yancey and Tim Stafford "Cheerful Sounds from a Jail Cell" *The Student Bible* NIV 1036  
 ix Jack Wellman "What Is The Difference Between Joy And Happiness In The Bible?" August 22, 2015 Patheos [www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/08/22/what-is-the-difference-between-joy-and-happiness-in-the-bible/](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/08/22/what-is-the-difference-between-joy-and-happiness-in-the-bible/)  
 x Sandra Brown "Joy -VS- Happiness: It might not even be 'happiness' per se that you were initially seeking." Dec 18, 2012 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/pathological-relationships/201212/joy-vs-happiness>