

WELCOME 11 November 2018 – 24 Pentecost '18 B

Philippians 1:1-2:18

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here. Please stay with us for morning tea after worship so we can get a chance to know one another better...

Everyone longs for joy and satisfaction in life. Yet sometimes our daily circumstances seem to conspire to rob us of joy. Maybe you feel boxed in, trapped or like life's thread is quickly unravelling and in danger of snapping. Paul's life was just like that and yet the joy that oozes from his life is surprising, mind boggling and even infectious. So where does that joy come from? Is it possible even when life is painful or a daily struggle? Paul's answer is unequivocally "yes". The presence of joy is not only possible but real. So today we will discover and taste Paul's recipe for Living in Joy

His answer...Only those united with Christ experience joy in the midst of turmoil pain or suffering. Only those united with Christ live a joy that lasts day in & day out come what may. Only those united with Christ know joy without end is what God promises when this life is over. Over these 3 weeks we'll step into the joy Paul shares and discover how in Christ we are right now. Living with Joy.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty Father, your will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the King of all. Govern the hearts & minds of those in authority, & bring the families of the nations divided & torn apart by the ravages of sin, to be subject to his just & gentle rule. Bring us O Lord God, to the last awakening & into the house & gate of heaven, where there shall be no darkness no sorrow no tears & no pain. Lead us one and all into the place of perfect and complete joy with you forever. We pray in the mighty name of Jesus...Amen.

24 PENTECOST '18 B – THE PRESENCE OF JOY: LIVING IN JOY

FAITH CHAT:

1. On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being Not at All and 10 being Absolutely How much are you enjoying life at this present time? Why or Why not?
2. Was there a time in your life, when you experienced overwhelming joy?

It was election season again in the US while I was there...both at state & local levels & at the national level. So imagine...50 states, dozens of contested races in each state for a vast array of offices...and you know...wall-to-wall channel-to-channel coverage & ads...one after another. It was inescapable. And to go by those ads; there were **NO GOOD CANDIDATES!** Nope! Not a single 1! Seriously... According to Candidate A, Candidate B was just “wrong” – wrong on taxes wrong on immigration wrong on healthcare wrong for _____. (fill in the name of your state because they all used the same ads) But according to B, A was a criminal! Any day now the feds were going to lock her up! According to Candidate X, Candidate Y ate puppies...but Y said X was a witch. See...no good candidates.

The coverage was overwhelming & unrelenting. The 24/7 news cycle was 24/7. There was a sense of heaviness when people talked about the current state of affairs...both globally & locally as folks I hung out with...whether we were talking about the US or the world all sensed some great catastrophe on the horizon. One person I met asked me if I was afraid to live in Australia because we are within missile range of *BOTH* Nth Korea *AND* China. Two others...educated, amazingly capable gifted really switched on folks I spent an afternoon with are convinced the US is headed for oblivion like at no other point in human history...

I really appreciated my mother's attitude...She switched to the weather channel... Except even that was tricky because parts of Texas had buckets of rain the 3 weeks I was there & even in one place I visited some rivers/lakes flooded the water system & we couldn't drink the H₂O so we had to drink bottled H₂O or beer. I made that sacrifice But it was weird being in one of the most prosperous/free nations on earth with all the indicators pointing up & to the right – things are good & getting better - & folks are living from a pervasive sense of worry, anxiety, fear & foreboding...I know it's never all roses but certainly the 4 horsemen of the apocalypse haven't saddled up yet.

So before I went to bed every night, I read Philippians. Not for sermon prep, but for my health...I had to remind myself that Paul is writing from a Roman prison, & *HE SAYS*, “I pray for you with joy.” Paul is likely chained to 2 Roman soldier who could snap his neck like a twig if the mood struck & get promoted for their trouble, & *HE SAYS*, being in prison is awesome because no one can walk out on my sermons & they're starting to understand & trust the good news of Jesus. He lives or dies by the whim of Caesar & *HE SAYS*, even if I die I'll find joy because I'll have died doing precisely what God called me to do. Over & over & over again Paul speaks about the joy that fills & saturates & spills out from him solely because he & the people of Philippi are immersed in the grace of God & “*You share with me the special favor (grace) of God, both in my imprisonment & in defending & confirming the truth of the Good News.*” He's filled with spilling over with shouting the gospel at the top of his lungs with **JOY** because he & his fellow redeemed are held in the unbreakable embrace of Jesus Christ **AND** their lives bear witness to the reality of the kingdom that is now ruling over all things in Jesus Christ.

How is that sort of joy possible for Paul & for ordinary disciples like us?

First...Paul knows joy is not is not is not an emotion...it is not a feeling...it is not tied to the fleeting changing momentary circumstances or situations of this life. Joy is not happiness. While I was in the US, someone won a \$1.5 billion lottery jackpot...yes 1 person. That's 15 with I think 8 zeroes after it. That could maybe help you be happy for a while. But a whole bunch of folks bought tickets & won squat...probably not happy. And...I read some stats on lottery winners. 80+% end up = or < than their \$\$ circumstances before they won all that dough. The vast majority of winners don't improve their situation in any lasting way...that would probably make you not happy. I needed a haircut & walked into a salon cold...just said “Oh look!” Got a decent shearing & I was happy. I got to see some longtime friends I did not expect to see & I was happy. I got rained on a bunch...not happy.

Joy is different. If I read Paul correctly: Joy is the soul-deep persistent confidence & delight in God & his sovereignty & purpose in all things. Look how Paul says it *I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.* It's awesome...Paul says we live bracketed/enveloped by the redeeming rescuing recreating work of the Father through his Son. Joy begins in God's work accomplished in us by the life/death/resurrection/rule of Jesus Christ.

In Rom 5 & then Rom 8 says because of Christ's death for us we have peace with God & no condemnation because we are united with Jesus. Our relationship with the Father is now unseverably restored. We are held & will not be dropped, forgotten, abandoned, cast off. A love we could not earn & a promise of life-to-the-full in the Father's presence that we

did not deserve...both ours as a gift. And today is right smack between the Father's choosing us as his children & objects of his love & the day Christ returns & we are taken to him as "a bride adorned for her husband."

Only within that framework of grace is joy possible...Paul declares in his loudest possible voice that the origin of joy is the Father's grace in Jesus Christ & that work of grace & love is only fulfilled when Christ returns & our joy is completed in Him eternally. Never lose sight of the promise of Ps 16: *You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence & the pleasures of living with you forever.* We are born again in Christ into his joy & our destiny is joy with him forever.

And right now Paul says, that joy endures in times of struggle & pain & threat because those times are intended to give us opportunity & boldness to share God's "message" *I want you to know, my dear brothers & sisters, everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence & boldly speak God's message without fear.* Joy endures in times of struggle & pain & threat so that you & I can declare in the face of our fears & in the face of those who don't yet get it, our reason for joy hope love & compassion...

But even more...Joy endures because we are bound together as Christ's body. *For I know that as you pray for me & the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance.* (I got believers praying for me & the Holy Spirit here in me. What's Caesar gonna do? He's got nothing.) There is strength in our presence & prayers for one another like nowhere else. Joy endures because we have one another...one another...A couple years ago we did some extended teaching on the 40 or so "one anothers" of the NT church (love one another, care for, encourage, honour, comfort, forgive...) It simply isn't possible to grow to your fullness in Jesus Christ alone – apart from his body the church. It isn't possible for joy to endure without the engagement of the brothers & sisters in Christ in your life.

We often say the real aim of our life as followers/disciples of Jesus is to look more & more like him...to imitate...to do what he did. And in that, joy reaches its highest point. Jesus' best friend John would write from his exile: *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.* I have no greater joy than to here you're living like looking like impacting the world like blessing folks like revealing the Kingdom like...Jesus who is "The Truth."

Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come & see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit & one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. I love that..."citizens of heaven"...big debate in the Western World about who's a citizen of where & what makes you a citizen of anywhere. Paul says live with values of the kingdom the same attitudes & standards & measures of success as Jesus...At the conference I went to for church planters we talked at length about holding ourselves as churches accountable to a different scorecard...For 40 years the scorecard for churches was this thing called "growth." Not a bad thing...we ought to be engaging more people & inviting more people & influencing more people under the leadership of the Spirit to become part of Christ's family. Church really ought to be growing if we're being faithful to our call as God's people.

But for 40+ years there have been churches that grew without widening the impact & influence of the Kingdom...more bottoms on pews but more homelessness more poverty more teen pregnancy more crime more drug abuse more family breakdown So Paul assures us that if we live in joy...lives founded on & bracketed by the joy of life in Christ a flood of impact becomes possible.

Follow his heart...vs 28...Don't be intimidated by the not-yet-Christian world...Live boldly as a sign that their days are numbered AND that they too can share what you have. Vs 29...privilege not only of knowing Christ but also of suffering for him. Embrace the world's ridicule...but your boldness – your uncompromising trust in Christ & devotion to him calls their worldview into question & points out their folly in betting their lives on anything but Christ. Then...chap 2...Generosity, humility, selflessness, unity, Christlikeness all proceed from the soil of joy & give off a radiance the world can never deny or dampen.

Listening to the 24/7 bad news cycle, the doom & gloom, the threat & disaster over & over the last few weeks was for me a wake-up call. It is too easy – too convenient to see our world through the lens of fear dread anxiety & worry. *But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God. I want all of you to share that joy. Yes, you should rejoice, & I will share your joy.* Even if God calls time tomorrow, I want to give every last breath so that those around me are caught up in that joy – that soul-deep persistent confidence & delight in God & his sovereignty & purpose in all things because Only those united with Christ live a joy that lasts day in & day out come what may. Only those united with Christ know joy without end is what God promises when this life is over.

Let's pray with that in mind: **Father in this world broken by sin, fear is the easy choice. By your Spirit lead us to choose your joy in Christ. Your joy tramples over sin and death and drives back darkness and evil. Let your joy be contagious in all we are and all we do so that you receive praise and glory through Jesus Christ...Amen.**