

WELCOME 1st October 2023 – 18th Sunday after Pentecost '23 A

Philippians 1:1-30

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Along with your worship order you have in your hands **Growing Praise** inserts & **Bible Study Qs** that are able to lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life, & help you share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.** Link will be on website...Tuesday...Wednesday...

As we move into this week...

As a kid I loved that little song...I've got the joy joy joy joy down in my heart...Where? That's the question isn't it? **Where?** Where is the joy? When...Life is painful. Uncertainty clouds our days. Frustration & disappointment, deterioration & grief are constant companions. Where's the joy when we live w/ grim expectations & experience increasing isolation/loneliness...feel like it's us against the world.

We would choose joy if we could & hang on to it w/ all our might.

But what if **joy** isn't a choice *YOU* make, but one that **ALREADY CHOSE YOU?** What if joy is already yours & you now are able to be infectious in spreading that joy everywhere you go? Paul says it is...already yours...contagious...infectious **AND** enduring... In the midst of life's difficulties, it's easy to develop selective memory & forget the grace we've received, the love we've been shown, & the blessings we've enjoyed. But Paul writes...

*Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. In all my prayers, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until **now.***

Paul in his letter from a Roman jail cell to the Philippian church invites us to embrace the pandemic of joy that is ours in the risen Jesus, is meant to be highly contagious, & leads to an abiding thankful joy that is in our hearts to stay.

Let's pray...and then explore that together...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God, your majesty & glory surround us here. You've gathered us to celebrate your presence, & to offer our lives to you as worship. We come to rejoice in your mighty acts, & to retell the story of your goodness throughout history & in our own lives. Move among us in this time; may your Spirit guide & inspire our thoughts & actions as we spend this time in your presence & as we go in your presence to serve this community in the name of our Saviour & Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let's hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. Where & when do you experience joy?
2. Share 2 things for which you are thankful?

18 PENTECOST '23 A – THE PANDEMIC OF JOY: THANKFUL JOY

Usually it's me who has interesting chats w/ strangers... This week it was Leonie. Neighbour up the street stopped by while Leonie was pulling weeds in the front garden...She complemented our lavender...full of blooms – really showy...Pumpkins & lavender...that's us! Anyway...while affirming that particular bed, the neighbour veered off into a rant on the state of the world. Nobody cares about beautiful things anymore. World's going to rot. Once she got going the dam burst & Leonie couldn't get a word in. There's a ministry out there just listening to people...In just a few minutes Leonie discovered there was no joy for this neighbour. World is off the rails...Hell in a bucket...sort of thing.

I hear echoes of that all the time. I don't even include the conspiracy stuff in that. "Nothing is like it used to be." Usually that's a comment on the ever-shifting faith, values, & morals of the 21st century. From how businesses & schools operate, to parenting, politics, marriages, medicine...Nothing is like it used to be. We all sense & see growing cultural divides...antagonism that forbids what used to be called "agree to disagree." If I disagree now...I'm evil. We all get it...Sometimes...

Life hurts. But more than just bad things we can point to...We experience huge doses of uncertainty...lack of trust & clarity. Life happens...temptations attack...sickness comes...needs overwhelm...loneliness suffocates...friends betray. Where's joy when decisions paralyze...worries strangle...finances dwindle...career stalls. We grapple to make sense of how decisions that affect us get made & how we should respond to things absolutely beyond our control. It's hard to know who to trust because so many in the public sphere don't seem trustworthy. We pray & wait for favourable circumstances to bring some relief/joy but they rarely come soon enough & never seem to stay. We live w/ grim expectations & at times feel like it's us against the world. We'd choose joy if we could & hang on to it w/ all our might. But like a greased pig at the rodeo...joy slips through...slips away...or so it seems...until...

This letter is from Paul & Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the church leaders & deacons. May God our Father & the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace & peace.

Paul begins where he knows his life/our lives began...grounded in the risen Jesus Christ. 3X in these 1st 2 verses, Paul says the name of & reign of Jesus are fundamental to everything he is & everything he does/desires. Paul declares his identity is found in Christ alone...he is Christ's *slave* (owned by – operating under the command of Jesus) **AND** the church in Philippi similarly *belongs to* Jesus. I really don't know anything about the church in Philippi...but what I know about them is what I know about us: **joy** isn't a choice **YOU** make, but one that **ALREADY CHOSE YOU**. To be *slave of or*

belong to Jesus means you have been swept up in the good news that God has come personally in Jesus to rescue, renew & make complete his creation...to forgive sin, destroy death & overthrow the forces of hell/evil once & for all by Jesus' life/death/rez/rule. Paul begins at our beginning...^{b/4} the beginning of time in God's choosing to act in grace mercy & love toward his broken rebellious world.

But he doesn't stop there...because the gospel, until Jesus returns to finish his work in recreating all that sin destroyed, is also the ongoing work of God through the lives of his people to live that new reality into existence right here right now. **Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. In all my prayers, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now.** What Paul means is this...the folks in Philippi are living the gospel in the teeth of whatever circumstances/struggles/situations in which they find themselves. Paul may not be right there w/ them, but he hears of their faithfulness & remembers what it was like when he was there & says... "I can see Jesus in **you.**"

Remember...Paul writes from a jail cell...probably in Rome. He's on the locked-in side of the iron-bar hotel...likely chained to a guard. He knows his life hangs in the balance. On the whim of Caesar he could be dead. He's been on the road for 20 years & likely feels the wear & tear of sleeping rough, the beatings & floggings. In some places his authority was under attack, others just his life. But those threatening circumstances could not wipe from his mind the image of the Philippian disciples praying for him & loving him & \$\$\$ supporting him & living the life & love of Jesus in the face of their own threatening & difficult circumstances **AND IN THAT** he knew he was not alone in that cell. Christ was present in/w/ him in his situation but also by their prayers & love & support so was the church in Philippi.

Over/over/over again Paul speaks about the joy that fills/saturates/spills out from him solely because he & the faithful in Philippi are immersed in the grace of God... Joy has taken hold of them & won't let go & won't stay locked in...Listen...**Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. In all my prayers, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now.** Then...**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.** Then...**You share with me the special favor (grace) of God, both in my imprisonment & in defending & confirming the truth of the Good News.**" Paul says we live bracketed by/steepled in 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. He's filled w/ spilling over w/ shouting the gospel at the top of his lungs w/ **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 risen Jesus now ruling over all things...

Paul knows joy is not an emotion...not a feeling...not tied to the fleeting changing momentary circumstances or situations of this life. Joy is not happiness. Joy is soul-deep persistent confidence **& delight** in God **AND** his sovereignty & purpose in all **things**. 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. We are born again in Christ into his joy & our destiny is joy w/ him forever. But joy is not just somewhere over the rainbow... somewhere after the struggle & hurt of this life ends...

Right now Paul says, joy endures in times of struggle & pain & threat because those times are intended to give us opportunity **AND** boldness to share what God has already done... **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.** Paul's joy...bubbling out all over is anchored in his trust that God is using even his dire straits to reveal the Kingdom & rule of Christ... Paul sees his confidence, his boldness, his faith have served to encourage & embolden others. Over the almost 20 years I've known most of you... I know many of you have carried immeasurable burdens w/ great faith...deaths, illness, family struggles, \$\$\$ challenge. I am strengthened by your faith. You've witnessed to this truth: *You need not be afraid of sudden disaster or the destruction that comes upon the wicked, for the Lord is your security. He will keep your foot from being caught in a trap.* **Pr. 3:25-26** 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... Joy grows trusting that God is somehow using even our greatest hardships to reveal the Kingdom & rule of Christ...to grow the likeness of Christ in me.

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? There is strength in our presence & prayers for one another like nowhere else. Joy endures because we have one another...one another...It simply isn't possible to grow to your fullness in Jesus Christ by yourself - alone apart from his body the church:|| It isn't possible for joy to endure w/o the engagement of the brothers & sisters in Christ in your life.

Remember last week we looked at the insistence of the early disciples that the body of Christ was w/o question a collection of contributors & investors not just consumers. Everybody brought a spiritual & tangible gift for the good of the whole...& to withhold your giftedness...to simply be a taker w/o giving was unheard of...destructive & disciplined. The apostles were united on that...*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. - 1 Cor 12:7 & As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace... 1 Pet 4:10* There is strength in our presence & prayers for one another like nowhere else. Joy endures because we have one another...It simply isn't possible for joy to endure or you to grow to your fullness in Jesus Christ by yourself - alone apart from his body the church.

This may be my favourite part of the letter. *Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ...Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God **himself**.* The only standard of measurement for my life & yours...Do people see the good news of Jesus in us? Do they see...forgiveness, compassion, hope, joy, peace, faith, contentment, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control? Or do they hear what Leonie heard from our neighbour? Nobody cares about beautiful things. World's going to rot...off the rails...hell in a bucket...When the heart of Christ (character faith attitudes values lifestyle) is evident in our hearts/lives & when opposition/antagonism from the not-yet-Xn world is met by love, boldness, & joy...they'll know their days are numbered **OR** that they too can share what you have. Be a part...or be apart?

It is too easy – too convenient to see our world through the lens of fear dread anxiety & worry and forget the grace we've received, the love we've been shown, & the blessings we've enjoyed. But...*Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. In all my prayers, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until **now**.*

TAKE IT HOME – As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...

*Every time I remember you, I thank God for **you**.*

Who is that person for you?

This week, send them a card...a note...an email...or...

if you have your phones, send them a text right after communion.

Let's pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus let your love in us overflow more and more, and by your Spirit grow our faith, wisdom, understanding, and boldness so the world will see you in us for your glory and the widening of your kingdom's reach. In your Name we pray...Amen.