

24/7 Joy  
Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 4:4-6, Nehemiah 8:8-9  
June 8, 2008 10AM  
Pastor Draeger

*24/7 Joy.* Pastor, haven't you been paying attention to the news? Did you not notice that in 1997 the price of crude was \$11.00 a barrel, and on Friday it went up by \$11.00? Have you not purchased gas in Redwood City? Have you not heard that is worse than AAA is reporting this morning? The average price of gasoline in our country is at \$4.00 today for regular? Don't you wish it were that cheap? Joy 24/7 - where have you been living, Pastor Hal, have you been under a rock somewhere? Did you not hear that the stock market went down by nearly 400 points? Have you not heard about the unemployment rate? Didn't you hear that the governor declared this is not only the State of California, but a state of drought? Were you not reading about what happened in Indianapolis over the week-end when a good portion of the town was under water? Have you not heard about the tornadoes that have been going through the mid-west toward the east coast? And the list could go on, couldn't it? Have you not heard, Pastor Hal, that 10% of the American population is currently diagnosed with a mood disorder which includes depression, dysthymia, bipolar disorder? Those are the ones that are diagnosed, not to mention the many people who go through life without a diagnosis because they have never seen a therapist. What's joyful about the news? It should be a new title in the mornings, it should not be Good Morning America, but Bad Morning America, should it not? If you believe that joy is in circumstances, you would have to say that's the wrong title for the news. What's interesting though is that the scriptures address some of these matters, and they address them quite frankly.

We have started a series on the 'Fruit of the Spirit.' Remember last week we started with Galatians 5? Let's see that one for a moment - the 'Fruit of the Spirit' is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. And so last week we looked at the first part of that sentence - the 'Fruit of the Spirit' *is*, and we said that *is* is singular. So there is one fruit of the new nature of Christ, and that fruit is described with nine different terms. So you can't just go picking out of the fruit like it's a fruit bowl and say I want some of love and I want some of joy, but I don't need any patience and certainly don't want any self control. So it's not like you can pick and choose -- these are all qualities that every fully developing follower of Christ ought to be expressing because everyone of them is a divine quality. And the divine reality is that Christ lives within us, and so we can in the power of the Holy Spirit in our new nature, produce these fruit. And I think it's also significant that these come in the order in which they come, and I'll tease that out in a moment.

As we think about the 2<sup>nd</sup> word joy, I'd like to also draw your attention to these words of the apostle Paul. He wrote in Philippians, also known as the letter of joy,

he wrote these words. "Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say again rejoice." Read that with me, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say rejoice."

I'd like to tell you a story about a man who wrote these words -- they are written in the last 4 years of his life. Just before writing these words, his life had become just absolutely chaotic. He had been attacked by an out of control mob that nearly killed him. He was misidentified as an Egyptian terrorist, sort of on the level of Osama Bin Laden. He was falsely arrested, he was in prison in Jerusalem, and after his release there was a foiled assassination attempt on his life. He was escorted by 470 soldiers to a town called Caesarea Maritime, Caesarea by the Sea. Witnesses lied about him and he became a focal point of a religious trial, and he spent two years in prison. Then finally as a Roman citizen, he appeals to Caesar and sets sail for Rome. Along the way out in the Mediterranean, they encountered some serious storms. Ultimately they're shipwrecked on an island called Malta. During 3 months spent there on Malta in the dead of winter, he is bitten by a poisonous snake. The people were threatened by him and they voted him off the island. They said, you're just bad luck man! Once again he sets sail for Rome. Then as they land in Rome he's in prison, basically in jail, he's living in an apartment under house arrest, but he's living 24/7 shackled to a Roman guard. He could go to the bathroom and it wouldn't even be private because there he is shackled to the Roman guard. Now, while he's in these circumstances, he writes those words to the Phillipians! Awesome!

I just wanted to give you some context. It wasn't a good day, it wasn't a good time in his life, and what's he saying? "Rejoice in the Lord always, and I say it again, rejoice!" Now either he had been nipping too much on the sauce or he knew something that the rest of the people didn't know. Always full of joy, and I say it again, rejoice. You see, the apostle Paul did not believe the myth that the happiest place on the planet is someplace in Orlando or Anaheim. It had nothing to do with geography; it had nothing to do with dear Walt Disney. See the apostle Paul believed the happiest place on the planet, indeed the happiest place in the universe, would be in the presence of God! See he connects joy with the presence of God in his life.

For some of us, it seems very wrong to think of God and joy. How many of us were raised or raise our kids this way? We're in church and it's serious. Stop smiling, and if you smiled or laughed you'd get thumped. And then clapping in church, how many of you were taught that's a good a sacred thing to do? And when you come back from communion, how are you supposed to look? *Dead* serious. The idea for some people who were raised in church is church is not someplace you are happy, that's not where you experience joy, it's not where God laughs. They have learned it quite differently from the way the scriptures teach. In Ecclesiastics we are told there's a time for everything, and in that context it says, "A time to weep and a time to laugh." It says there's a time to mourn and a time to dance. And it doesn't say the time to laugh and dance is only when you're not in church. In fact, if you look at Nehemiah 8 with me, verses

9 and 10, "Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe and the Levites who were instructing the people, said to them all, "This day is sacred to the Lord your God, do not mourn or weep." In other words for them it's a time of joy. For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the law. Nehemiah said go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord; do not grieve for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So this is a divine quality, it's an attribute in God; that joy is a divine reality, it is a part of who God is. And if it's a part of who God is, maybe it's ok for those of us who are God's people to show joy always. And if I read that right, always means even in church. So it's ok to smile in church, it's ok to laugh and maybe even ok to clap, because mountains will clap unto the Lord if we don't. God is into joy. By the way that was the Old Testament God in Nehemiah wasn't it? This is not the New Testament God, as though they're different. In the minds of some they are, but not biblically.

Now I'd like to just tie this up into Jesus. Take it fast forward into Jesus' life, and in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel, now this is not long before Jesus was crucified, so He knows what's coming. So in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel starting with verse 9, He says, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you, now remain in my love. And if you obey my commands you will remain in my love just as I have obeyed my Father's command and remain in His love. I have told you this so that *my joy* may be in you, so that your joy may be complete." Do you get that? And then what does He talk about next, again? He says, My command is this, "Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business, instead I've called you friends for everything I have learned from My Father I have made known to you." Isn't it interesting how Jesus in this text connects joy and love? Just like Paul does, the 'Fruit of the Spirit' is love and joy. These things are intimately related. You cannot separate the love of God and the joy of our Lord from one another, anymore than they can be separated in our lives. That as we love God and are loved by God we experience the joy of the Lord as our joy. God so loved the world, that He gave.

I'd like to submit to you folks that joy is less about the price of gasoline or crude, or whether or not people's homes are being foreclosed like Ed McMahon's. So you don't have to be just normal people, here's Ed McMahon and his wife, their house is being foreclosed. It doesn't matter the circumstances. What gives us joy is indeed the forgiveness of sin. It is God's forgiveness for us that is the centerpiece of His loving expression. It is that love for people as friends, that He would lay down His life Jesus said, and then He talks about joy. So forgiveness of sin, love and joy are all connected. And what happened in our baptism? We were washed and renewed for the forgiveness of sin. What happens when you read the message of the Gospel? It says that your sin is forgiven. We heard that so eloquently portrayed by the apostle Paul in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading that Jeff shared with us this morning. And you see it demonstrated when Jesus takes sinners and

hangs out with them. It's about the forgiveness of sin, and therefore there is joy because we are so loved by this amazing God. Joy is less about our circumstances than it is about our relationship with the God who has loved us and who forgives us.

God so loved the world that He gave, and He keeps on giving. Forgiveness through His Son and it is in that water of baptism, it is in that message of the Gospel, it is in that bread and wine at Holy Communion, that Jesus chains Himself to us 24/7. He says I won't let you go. Wherever you go, I go, and I bring My love and My joy wherever you are.

I thought it was interesting that Paul was chained to a Roman guard. Do you know that there were 9,000 hand picked soldiers? What do you think they knew about the love of God? Not much. What do you think Paul, the paragon of missionaries, the apostle of apostles, what do you think he was thinking when he was chained to the Roman guard? *CAPTIVE AUDIENCE!!* And I'll bet he's thinking, if I can witness to this guy, and he has friends, that maybe somehow there'll be a trickle out effect. There'll be a new style of chain message, if you will. And since he didn't have e-mail he couldn't distribute it quite as rapidly, but I bet he did it as rapidly as he possibly could.

Maybe some of you are chained today too. 24/7 chained to a body that's imperfect. Chained to pain, physical debilitating illness. Perhaps you like Paul could say, I'm going to take these chains and I'm going to find a way to love people and bring joy to them, the joy of the Lord. Maybe you've been a stay-at-home mom and you've wondered about being chained to little ones, and you have dreams about things like diapers and bottles and Gerber oatmeal and stuff like that, and you have a college degree and you think your life has been meaningless. Abilities are wasting away and what you get to think as a fully devoted and developing follower of Christ is, I have a chance to have my child know that he or she is treasured by the God most high and loved for eternity.

Some are chained to their careers and they're miserable -- they find no way out. Seems like they're stuck in this career, it's too late to change jobs, I can't put together the skill set and the time I need to make a difference. You might be able to reframe that with something like this: I'm in a spot where I can be loving toward people, the people I work with. Joyful people, you see, are loved people, and so if you love the people you work with you can bring them joy. Just like the love of God brings you joy through the forgiveness of sin.

One of the biggest surprises about joy for those who suffer most, is that they tend to have the highest level of joy. Louis Smead, now a deceased professor at Fuller Seminary once wrote, "You and I were created for joy, and if we miss it we miss the reason for our existence. If our joy is honest joy however, it must somehow be congruous with human tragedy. This is a test of joy's integrity, is it compatible with pain? Only the heart that hurts has a right to joy." Hm, that's

something to think about isn't it? I'll bet Paul got that message deep in the core of his being. In the last four years of his life and even before, his life was not a picnic; it wasn't summer camp. It was tough, and yet in those last four years he wrote those words in Philippians again, let's read those words again. "Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice!"

With that in mind, come forward to receive the gift of forgiveness, and again the taste of His love in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Ponder maybe the times when you've made it too much about yourself and therefore lost joy. Ponder those things, give them to God and we will call it confession of sin. And know that He absolutely forgives you because that's His passion to forgive His people. That was His passion in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. They messed it up, they went after joy their way. And yet what did He do? He searched them out and gave these joyless people a message of hope - the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent, and that would happen on a cross. So we can lay our sins at the cross of Jesus where we've tried to put it too much about ourselves, where we've moaned and groaned and grumbled because life isn't fair, and in a sinned stained world it won't be. But one thing is certain, you are loved. You are loved through a cross, from an empty tomb, and in this sacrament you're going to experience that love again -- a love that is about forgiveness, forgiveness that is real and life changing. And when you walk away, it's really ok with God I think, if you show joy. Because indeed if your sin is forgiven and you have the joy of the Lord, your face might want to show it. And then you might want to take that joy with you into the marketplace, and when you feel the aches and pains of life, would you remember 'the joy of the Lord is my strength I can have joy 24/7.' Once again would you read this with me, "Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice" Now let's say it like you mean it, "Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice!" And there's only one thing left to say, Amen.

Now may the peace of God which keeps and guards our hearts and minds keep us in joy, because the joy of the Lord is your strength, Amen.