

121723 Sermon "Rejoice Always" 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Scottish minister Alexander Whyte was known for his uplifting prayers in the pulpit. He always found something for which to be grateful. One Sunday morning the weather was so gloomy that one church member thought to himself, "Certainly the preacher won't think of anything for which to thank the Lord on a wretched day like this." Much to his surprise, however, Whyte began by praying, "We thank Thee, O God, that it is not always like this." (Daily Bread, August 26, 1989.)

Mother Teresa said this: "The best way to show my gratitude to God is to accept everything, even my problems, with joy". Today is the third Sunday of Advent. The pink candle of today symbolizes Joy. The joy that comes through Jesus' arrival, and through the salvation he has gifted us.

You may wonder why the church decided to make this particular candle a different color than the others. Although people have presented several reasons for the pinkish nature of the candle, from a tradition where priests would wear pink vestments to parents eagerly awaiting the joy of a child's arrival.

In the Bible passage given to us today, Apostle Paul speaks to the members of the Thessalonian church. "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

It's a very famous Bible verse and it's good to listen to, but honestly, it's a challenge to all of us. Even from the first sentence. "Rejoice always." The Greek word, "chairete" (from the root word, "chairo"), is a common greeting, and means "Rejoice!" Joy and rejoicing are common themes throughout the Bible.

The daily life we live in changes all the time. Our moods also change depending on the environment, change over time, and change depending on the other person. But how can you always be joyful?

I read an article from Mayo Clinic Health System, titled "Tips for embracing joy in daily life." The title was interesting to me especially from one of top-ranked hospitals in the US:

Stress isn't new. Modern technology has made some tasks easier, but stress levels have stayed the same or increased. About 27% of U.S. adults report that they are so stressed most days that they are unable to function. Over 75% experienced at least one stress-related symptom in the last month, like headache, fatigue, nervousness or feeling depressed.

Joy is a powerful emotion and harnessing it can be a remedy for stress-related burnout. Contentment and joy can positively improve physical and mental health and overall well-being.

It's easy to confuse the emotions of joy and happiness because they often are experienced at the same time. Yet, some nuances should be distinguished. Often, happiness is the emotional reaction to what is happening around you. Whereas joy isn't reactionary and often is driven by internal motivations like working toward a goal or finding a purpose in life...

"Happiness is an emotion, whereas joy is more a state of being," says Rebekkah Frunzac, M.D., general surgeon and chief wellness officer at Mayo Clinic Health System in Minnesota... "Happiness is fleeting, but my joy still drives me on a terrible day. Because I have a purpose in life, I still have joy

even during a horrible time." (Karizma Maxson, neonatal ICU nurse manager)

The joy spoken of here and the joy Paul speaks of in today's Bible are related. Rebekkah said, this joy is not situational, but more a state of being. Apostle Paul said this joy is existential and relational joy in Christ. During a time where depression is at an all-time high and people seem to be in the most despair, Advent candle offers a bright light during a dark time. Likewise, I hope and pray that the reason Jesus came to earth, his sacrifice and love will be a constant source of joy for you.

I'm not suggesting that you should be pretending that everything's "fine," but that in the midst of everything your focus is on God's goodness toward you in Christ, and your trust is in God.

"Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 (Thessalonians 5:18)

These verses present thankfulness as a constant attitude of the heart. No matter what you're doing, no matter what's going on in your life, no matter what your circumstances, be thankful because you're in Christ's love.

Recognize that although not everything is good in itself, God can and will use everything in our lives for our ultimate blessing. Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." God has a good and wise and loving purpose for everything He allows into our lives, even pain and suffering.

Charles Spurgeon once spoke of Joy.

“There is a marvelous medicinal power in joy. Most medicines are distasteful; but this, which is the best of all medicines, is sweet to the taste, and comforting to the heart. This blessed joy is very contagious. One dolorous spirit brings a kind of plague into the house; one person who is wretched seems to stop all the birds from singing wherever he goes... [But] the grace of joy is contagious. Holy joy will oil the wheels of your life’s machinery. Holy joy will strengthen you for your daily labor. Holy joy will beautify you and give you an influence over the lives of others.”

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, Joy is essential to the Christian experience. We cannot get far without it, and we need it as we anticipate the coming of our Savior. God gave us a reason to celebrate when God gave us the unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ. Immanuel, God with us! No situation or person in the world can take away this joy that is in Christ Jesus. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. To Christ be thanks and praise. Amen.