

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Pentecost 21

October 25, 2020

Sermon by Pastor Dan Pautz

Rejoice!

—Philippians: 4:4-8

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.

Have you ever had a time when your body just ached? Your joints were stiff? There was a crick in your neck? Maybe you even were hobbling about as you walked. Your back hurts? And you wish that someone would crack your back. These things can happen not only to older people but also to middle aged people, to young adults, and to students. You come to realize that you need to get an adjustment. Perhaps you go to a chiropractor for an adjustment.

Ever need an attitude adjustment? Symptoms of a need for an attitude adjustment are when you have an ongoing grouchy irritable attitude or being negative most of the time or ongoing sadness. Before we go on any further, when we speak about sadness, we are not speaking about the kind that can be caused by physical problems such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's Disease, Bi-polar, or certain types of depression. Nor are we speaking about the sadness and hallucinations that can be caused by certain medications. But we are speaking of 'normal' ongoing sadness. You need an attitude adjustment If you are full of yourself, arrogant, inconsiderate, ungrateful, and conceited. It is high time them to get an attitude adjustment. I suggest that you read an attitude adjustment book. It is short, only four chapters long. It is the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians. The epistle readings for the past four Sundays have been from Philippians. The book begins with a positive tone as Paul greets his readers with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ – and the last words are “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.” The first chapter speaks about rejoicing and the last chapter speaks about rejoicing and contentment. **“Rejoice!”**

We have to keep things in perspective. There are many sad and disappointing things in life. Paul had them too. It is amazing that when Paul wrote this letter about joy, he was in chains. He was imprisoned basically for being a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus. His trial was going on – and there was a definite prospect of being executed. He also had a deep sorrow about those who continued to reject Jesus including many of his fellow Jews. Our Lord Jesus Himself had sadness. He did not have an easy life. Isaiah called Him a man of sorrows. He wept at the graveside of Lazarus. He wept over the city of Jerusalem because many of its inhabitants had rejected His grace. His disciples often disappointed Him – He had to say to them. He was moved to hurt and deep compassion over the many who were afflicted with sickness and disease. To top it all off were the belittlement and agony and pain of crucifixion where he was forsaken by God the Father punishing Him for our sins.

I hardly need tell you that your lives have sadness and problems. In this life are cancers and divorce, aging and injustice, abortions and adulteries, death and disease, friends and family members who have strayed from Jesus, the COVID with all of its implications, deep, deep concerns for our nation. And then the worse of all is the sorrow for our sins. David in Psalm 6 tells of his agony and anguish and shame and tears over his sins. You have experienced that too.

Yet in the midst of all this din and sin in life comes the clear directive, “Rejoice.” Even though sad things are as common as mosquitoes in Minnesota, yet our foundation feeling and attitude ought to be that of joy. Listen to what God is telling you through Paul. “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” I will list seven pointers from Paul about rejoicing.

The first and the most important pointer is where to find true and lasting joy! “Rejoice in the Lord always.” In the Lord! Some look for happiness in all the wrong places. “I'd be happy,” they say, ‘if only I had more money, or a better home, or be better looking and more popular, or more athletic, or healthier. Indeed, these things are blessings but they are not the source of true and lasting joy. Liquor and drugs do not deliver real happiness. The Bible states, Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise. (Prov. 20:1)

“Rejoice in the Lord,” Paul says. How amazing it is that the Lord cares for us. How blessed we are that our sins are forgiven. After this short life is over, heaven is ahead of us, thanks be to the Lord. Jesus once told His disciples then and you today “Rejoice that your name is written in the Book of Heaven.” Realize too that the Lord will be with you throughout your life and will take care of you. We say happily, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I will not be lacking.” Through good days and challenging days your Lord will be with you and “make all things work together for your good.” Rejoice in the Lord.

A second quick pointer in connection with rejoicing is the word ALWAYS. Our joy is not to be limited only to when things are going our way or when we are facing difficulties but all the time - when we go off to school or work, whether we have a test at school or even a medical test, whether we head for vacation or for the hospital, when everything is going our way and even when we are treated unjustly as was the case with the Apostle Paul as he sat in jail.

A third pointer is in the words “Do not be anxious about anything.” You see, joy and anxiety just do not mix. They do not tolerate each other's company. You can not be a worried happy person. Have you ever been a victim of a thief or a scam? Has someone ever broken into your house or car? Have you ever had someone steal your credit card numbers? We would like them

to be caught and punished. But your worry is every bit as much as a thief for it robs you of joy and peace. We often are our own worst enemy. The cause of your unhappiness is not out there some place, but it is inside of you in your fears, your coveting, and especially in your worries. A hymn verse puts it this way.

“How can these anxious worries aid you, These never-ceasing moans and sighs? Will not his wings of mercy shade you Whenever troubled times arise? Our cross and trials do but press The heavier for our bitterness.” Get rid of them, the Lord says.

But how? That is the fourth pointer for happiness. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Pray. Another hymn puts it very well. *What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry Ev'rything to God in prayer! Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Ev'rything to God in prayer!* You pray to the Lord and trust that He will take care of the problem, maybe not in the way that you want but it the way that He has in mind.

Pointer 5 for Rejoicing: Thanksgiving. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” If you would thank God everyday for something, your mind will dwell on blessings instead of only on difficulties in life. You will see a mountain of great things we often overlook because we consecrate on our troubles which for the greater part are specks. A couple who had been given to complaining about this and that decided that at end of the day, each would mention to the other something for which to be thankful to God. And there were so many things.

Pointer 6. “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Simply put, God is not at war with us, He who had every right to be justly angry with us sinners is not angry. Through Jesus Christ who is called the Prince of Peace our sins have been atoned for. What joy!

Pointer 7 which is a sister to Pointer 5 which was thanksgiving. This pointer is: “Think about good things.” Notice the pile of WhatEVERS: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.” Many people including some Christians let their mind think only about negative and sad things. Sometimes it seems that we even have a knack of finding sad things in good things. We are cold-water specialists, killjoys, believing that every silver cloud has a dark lining. It is easy to criticize family members and your fellow believers. But God expects you to put the best construction on all things. . Or perhaps you are among those who do the twist. You twist what people say –you get out your black crayon and darken what is said or done. Guide your mind to think about good things. Can you control your thinking? To a large degree you can. The Lord thinks so, for through Paul He that you should put your mind on all the blessings of the Lord, of how He leads people to serve Him, of all the good things going on. That will give joy.

Just as parents want their children to be well-disciplined and happy, so the Lord wants you and all of His children to rejoice. Several days ago there was a bird at the very top of one of my trees singing a beautiful happy song. It just kept it up. Now if one of these little creatures of God that likely is not aware of its Creator and the great love God has could be so happy, what holds us back? Rejoice!