

Joy

December 31, 2023

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ online ministry. This week's message is titled "Joy" and it's the third in this year's Advent series. Thank you to Earl, Rhonda, Gloria, and Don for being part of the video. The scripture reading is Luke 2:8-14. A very happy 50th anniversary to Ed and Rhonda, who are celebrating on December 31st.

Welcome, Announcements, Prayer

Well, good morning. We'll begin with a few announcements. Happy birthdays. Geoff's not here and I am. So, so the, the, I have to let you, you know, December 21st is my birthday. It's the least number of daylight hours in a year. So, I've always coined the expression, "I was born on the darkest day of the year." So, you know, we're downhill until the 21st, then it's uphill in terms of daylight hours heading towards spring.

Paul is suffering from kidney stones and is in a lot of pain. He's on a wait list for surgery and of course is also facing some uncertainty regarding his employment. So, we ask in addition to Paul also to keep Pam and Care and Jo in our prayers. We'd like to thank Janet for doing all the decorations here. So, taking the time and the planning to do that. So, looks very festive. Anyway, let's go to God in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you for this opportunity of coming together as your people. We thank you for the love that prompted you to send Jesus into this world. And at this particular season of the year, it seems the world is focused on that event. And so, we pray Father that you will help us to concentrate on the message of the season. But Father, we know it goes far beyond that. The reason you sent him was to offer himself upon the cross as a sacrifice for our sins, giving us an assurance of a home with you throughout eternity. So, for this, we praise you. We pray that this morning as we sing songs of praise, that you will accept them. That Father, you'll be with Don as he speaks to us. And as we meet around the table this morning, help us to be encouraged by our time together and to offer you the praise and glory that you so richly deserve.

Father, we pray that there are those in our congregation who are having health issues at this time when we pray for Paul and for Pam and for Care and for Jo. We pray that you will be with those who are attending to them, that if surgery is needed, if physiotherapy is needed, if doctor's appointments and specialists are in the cards for these people, that you would help all of these practitioners to offer to them the best possible service so that they might be eased of their afflictions. We pray Father that you will help us as we go forth from this place to take the messages and the encouragement of this hour and to demonstrate that in our daily lives as we interact with others. Is our prayer in Christ's name. Amen.

Communion

Good morning, everyone. My good friend Dianne gave me a card recently. It's a beautiful card on the outside, but it's a beautiful card on the inside. It says, "May the peace, love and joy of the Christmas season be yours throughout the year." And that's a pretty challenging statement. May the peace, love and joy of the Christmas season be yours throughout the year. And how can we make that happen?

Well, what is that peace, for instance? What is it? People who we've talked about already this morning who are suffering would probably say it's not physical peace. And is it political peace? Well, maybe, but Jesus says in Luke 21, he said, "Don't be afraid when you hear of wars and revolutions. Such things must happen first, but they do not mean that the end is near." So, it's not political peace because he said there's going to be wars. Well then, what about relational peace between people? Jesus says again in Luke 12, he says, "Do not suppose that I came to bring peace to the world." No, not peace, but division. "From now on, a family of five will be divided, three against two and two against three. Father will be against their sons, and sons against their fathers. Mother will be against their daughters, and daughters against their mothers. Mother-in-laws will be against their daughter-in-laws, and daughter-in-laws against their mother-in-laws. So, it's not relational peace. That's not the peace he's talking about.

And I think the peace that Jesus is talking about, and again, this peace keeps coming up all through, at the beginning of every epistle pretty much, it says, "May God give you grace and peace." So, what is this peace? Well, I think it was covered in "Hark, the Herald Angels" saying that which is saying, "God and sinner reconciled." That's the peace that's being talked about. Romans 5, verse 1, "Now that we've been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. For when we were still helpless, Christ died for the wicked at the time that God chose. It is a difficult thing for someone to die for a righteous person. It may even be that someone might dare to die for a good person. But God has shown us how much He loves us." And here's the love in this card. He's shown us how much He loves us. "It was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us. By His blood we are now put right with God. How much more then will we be saved by Him from God's anger? We were God's enemies, but He made us His friends through the death of His Son. Now that we are God's friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ's life?"

And then Colossians, it's again there. It says, "Through the Son then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to Himself. God made peace through His Son's blood on the cross and so brought back to Himself all the things both on earth and in heaven. Through Christ we have peace. But naturally I think we're enmity with God, and especially when things go wrong, we can be in enmity with God. But through Christ we have peace." It's from Isaiah. It says, "We despised Him and rejected Him. He endured suffering and pain. No one would even look at Him. We ignored Him as if He were nothing. But He endured the suffering that should have been ours. The pain that we should have borne. All the while we thought that His suffering was punishment sent by God. But because of our sins He was wounded, beaten because of the evil we did. We are healed by the punishment He suffered, made whole by the blows He received. All of us were like sheep that were lost, each of us going his own way. But the Lord made the punishment fall on Him, the punishment all of us deserved. He was treated harshly but endured it humbly. He never said a word, like a lamb about to be slaughtered, like a sheep about to be sheared. He never said a word. He was arrested and sentenced and led off to die, and no one cared about His fate. He was put to death for the sins of our people. He was placed in a grave with those who are evil. He was buried with the rich, even though He'd never committed a crime or ever told a lie."

Recently I've been thinking about this, and I did a painting that has to do with a lot of this. In the painting, I called the painting "The Staircase to Heaven." And I think a lot of us think that we can go up that staircase to heaven. And we can go up that staircase by being moral, by being good. But I think if you're at all human, you probably take two steps up and one down, and sometimes one step up and two down. And it's not our morality that takes us up those stair steps. It's because Christ came down

the stair steps. It's Christ coming down the stair steps. And that's where we find our peace in the fact that Christ came down the stair steps. And that's where we find our joy. And that's, it's His love. It's His love, it's our peace that leads to our joy. It has nothing to do with the peace that's in this world, and it has nothing to do with our own morality. We can be very, very good or very, very bad, but it's still Christ coming down those stair steps. And I think sometimes people think, "I'm not good enough for God. You are good enough for God." It's not whether you are good enough for God because of what God did for you, not because what you did for God, where everyone here is good enough for God. And that faith is an important thing. Let's pray.

Thank you, God, so much for coming down to earth and for the suffering that you did, and for being the Lamb that was slain for us. And thank you that we can have the peace that we have because of your love, and that we can have the joy that we have because of your love, no matter what our earthly circumstances are, that we have that at our core, that our faith in you, and that we just know that you're there for us, and we thank you for that. In Jesus' name, amen.

[music]

Scripture Reading

[Luke 2:8-14](#)

That was pure joy watching Violet with her little sparkly shoes. The reading this morning is from Luke 2, verses 8 to 14, and we all probably can recite it.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Suddenly, a great company of heavenly hosts appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Sermon

Good morning to all. Very grateful to have you with us today. Malcolm Mugridge, some of you may remember the intellectual, controversial intellectual, who commented what Mother Teresa said about joy, and I thought it was excellent. Joy is prayer. Joy is strength. Joy is love. Joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls. God loves a cheerful giver. The one who gives with joy will bring joy. The best way to show our gratitude of God and people is to accept everything we can with joy. A joyful heart is the normal result of a heart burning with love. Never let anything so fill you with sorrow as to make you forget the joy of Christ risen. We all long for heaven where God is, but we have it in our power to be with him, even right now, as he is with us. To be happy with him at this very moment, being happy with him now means these words from Mother Teresa. Loving as he loves, helping as he helps, giving as he gives, serving as he serves, rescuing as he rescues us all, being with him 24 hours, touching him in his distressing disguise. Beautiful words.

So, we've been going through the various aspects of Advent, and today we're going to be looking at joy. Our themes of Advent, we've noticed the blessings that we can focus on, and joy is certainly one of

them. Charles Spurgeon said these words, "If you have no joy in your religion, there is a leak in your Christianity." Although the New Testament centers on the cross, its note from beginning to end is one of triumphal joy. It begins with an angel chorus and ends with rejoicing around the throne. In the Gospel of John, it says following the resurrection of Jesus, that the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. I always wonder about people who lived in the 12th century, 13th century, 14th century, 15th century, what their culture would be like and what Christmas would be like for them. But many years ago, in 1787, Samuel Stenet wrote these words, "To him," meaning Christ, "I owe my life and breath all the joys I have. It is God himself who allows me triumph over death and saves me from the grave."

And then even in the Old Testament, there are these wonderful stories of joy. Deuteronomy 17 talks about celebrating the feast of tabernacles. Sometimes at Christmas time, there are lots of feasts, lots of happiness, lots of gatherings. And even though sometimes in the Old Testament, it seems like it was so hard and so rigid and so terrible, but there were many, many times where God said, "I want you to rejoice. You must rejoice." And wonderful prophets would encourage the people to live with joy and encouragement. Way back in Deuteronomy, celebrate the feast of tabernacles for seven days. Have a celebration for seven days. And after you gathered all the threshing floor and the wine press, then come to the feast and be, what do you think, joyful. "For the Lord your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands. Your joy will be complete." So, I looked through the commentary this past week. I looked at a number of scriptures dealing with this joy. And I couldn't help but have to, as I was scribbling things and going back, I counted how often the word joy was used, even in times when it wasn't very pleasant. But there was joy with us. And we must never forget, as I have sometimes forgotten, the joy that Jesus gives us even in dark times. He is with us. I am with you. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. I am always with you. And sometimes we just have to remember that even at Christmas time.

So, the book of Psalms overflows with joy, just some of these scriptures. Chapter four and verse seven, "You have filled my heart with greater joy." Chapter five and verse 11, "Let all who take refuge in the Lord be glad. Let them ever sing for joy." And then in chapter 16 and verse 11, "You will fill me with joy in your presence." Sadness and joy can go hand in hand. Let me explain. My mother suffered with cancer for many years. And getting toward the end, she had suffered terribly. And then the last day of her life, she had a smile. She knew where she was going. She couldn't wait to get to the other side, to see her loved ones, but to see the face of Jesus for the first time. This is joy. Joy and sadness can connect. But there's this overwhelming joy of saying to us over and over again, "I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. I am always with you." Sometimes when we don't feel it, just say it enough until you do feel it. Because he is with us. And so, through the Old Testament, these wonderful scriptures of joy, even in difficult situations, in chapter 19 and verse 8, the precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart, 21 and 6. "You have granted him us with blessings and made us glad with joy in his presence." How many of us believe that we are in his presence right now? Because we must believe. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. I am, help me, always with you. Always. Even when we're fast asleep, I am always with you. It's this joy. And then in chapter 28, "Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry." We've all had difficult times. "My heart trusts in him, and then my heart leaps with joy to restore the joy of our salvation."

So, when my mother did pass away, and many of you had situations like that, oh, it's so sad. But there's joy. We will see each other again. The promise of Jesus. We'll look into God's eyes, see him face to face.

Look into Jesus' eyes, see him face to face. Look at the Holy Spirit, see him face to face. Be with our loved ones again. And really, when you love someone, they're always with you. They're always with you. This is really maybe not so much a Christmas sermon, but in reality, I think it's a profound Christmas sermon in the sense of who we belong to and to whom we belong.

So, in Psalm 51, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation." It was somebody who lost that joy. So, God, please help me get this back. Or in chapter 12 of Isaiah, "Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things. Shout out loud and sing for joy," as we did today and as Adam continually led through us and as he has every week for a long time now, the great joyous songs, the new songs that we're learning. Luke 24, "Following the resurrection, Jesus showed them his hands and feet, and while the disciples still couldn't believe it, yet because of joy and amazement, it was overwhelming, and their happiness overflowed." Or Romans 14. So, notice how many books talk about this in the scriptures. Romans 14, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace," and somebody help me, "Joy in the Holy Spirit who lives in us." I don't think we give enough thought and encouragement of the wonderful blessings of the Holy Spirit. He's always bringing us closer to God, always, constantly and continually, even right now. He is with us.

And so, when Paul writes to the church at Corinth, he says that even though he had been in distressing situations, that he would still rejoice. Paul had confidence in the church in Corinth, and he said to them to share the joy that he had in the Lord. And he's talking about this while he's in prison, the joy that we can still have. Or in Galatians, Paul reminds the church, and this can sometimes happen in a church, Paul reminds the church to recover the joy they had from the beginning. Don't let it be a period. Continue it. Recover the joy they had from the beginning. And he says out loud to all those who would listen, even in the scripture today, what has happened to all your joy? Well, there's lots of reasons, but I'm with you. Your joy can be complete because God is with us. Or in Philippians, Paul writes to the church at Philippi, and he says, "I thank God every time I remember you." And we probably do this in our congregation. "I was thinking about you this past week, and I should have wrote off a note, or I should have given you a call. I think about this person, that person, this person. We all do. Think about this." So, Paul reminds us, "Think about this. I thank God every time I remember you in all my prayers for all of you." As we've prayed for Pam and other people over the years and continue to do so, he says, "I always pray, listen to this, and for Pam, with joy, because of your partnership in the Gospel." We're all together, brothers and sisters in Christ. There are people all over the world we have never met, but they are our sisters and our brothers. And we experience that joy. When Paul was writing to the church at Thessalonica, it was a very difficult time. There was a lot of suffering going on in the Christian world. And then he says this, "In spite of severe suffering, you welcome the Gospel message with joy, given by the Holy Spirit." One of the reasons that we can have joy, even during difficult times, is because of God's Holy Spirit, reminding us that God is with us.

So, in Timothy, Paul writes to encourage Timothy, the book of Timothy, reminds him that his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, had great faith, and that Timothy needs, listen, to fan into flame the gift of God. Do not give up that spirit. Do not have a spirit of timidity, but have a spirit of, listen, love, power, I don't mean power, personal strength power, but the power of doing good to others, the power for all people. Self-discipline, filled with joy. In this little book, Philemon writes to this friend, "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith so that you have a full understanding of every good thing that we have in Christ Jesus." And how many good things do we have in Christ Jesus?

More than a couple. It's just everlasting. It never ever stops. It's given us great joy. He has refreshed the hearts and our souls.

And then whoever wrote the book of Hebrew, not sure who it was, nonetheless, it is a powerful book of faith, love, and joy. The writer says that even though we're surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, we need to throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run the race with perseverance. Let's fix our eyes on Jesus and the perfecter of our faith. Listen. "Who for the joy set before him endured the cross." Joy and crucifixion don't seem to go hand in hand, but the result was one of great joy. It scorns its shame, sitting down at the right hand of God. And then the writer says not to grow weary and not to lose heart. And in the book of James, he has such an incredible faith that he says, "Consider it pure joy, brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds." Faithful perseverance is part of being a Christian. It's not always easy. We must always remember the words of Jesus. As we've said week after week after week recently, "I will never leave you." "I will never forsake you." "I am with you." Whether you believe it or not. I choose to believe it. How about you? So, in Peter, he writes that even though we may not see God, we love Him, we're filled with joy, knowing that we are receiving the gift, the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls. How can you get any better than that? Jesus was born to be the savior of all, to place their faith in Him even today.

So please hear the word of the Lord spoken by John. Powerful words. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at, our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the word of life, Jesus." The life appeared, Jesus. We have seen it, Him, and testify to Him. And we proclaim concerning the word of life. This life appeared. We have seen it or seen Him and testified to Him. And we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us. Yes, as a baby. And then as a teenager. And then as an adult. And then as He is. With God the Father, with the Holy Spirit, with Himself, and with us. Never a moment has He pulled away from us. He's always with us. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. So, we proclaim to you what we've seen and heard so that we can have fellowship with each other. And our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ. So we write this to make our joy complete. And in this tiny little book in 2 John, only 13 verses, John writes, "It has given me great joy to find your children walking in the truth just as your Father asked you. And as you have heard from the beginning, His command is that you walk in love." How love and faith are so connected. And then in 3 John, He writes to a friend. Says, "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy to have some brothers and sisters come and tell me about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in that truth.

And even today, we are reminded by the Hebrew author, listen to these words. We, that means we're all included, we have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come, and just imagine this is going to happen. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. That's who we are. That's who we will be. The choir of heaven that we can join. You have come to God. And then He said, "I saw the holy city. I saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. I heard a voice from the throne saying, now the dwelling of God is with us. God will live with us. They will be His people. We will be His people. God Himself will be with us." And then these precious words that we've already spoken, "There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the old order of things is passed away. Who has seated on the throne says out loud, I am making everything new."

In the story of A Christmas Carol, Scrooge was a grasping, selfish, egotistical person until he realized he was on his way to the grave with no hope because of his selfishness and his greed. But the ghosts, or I'd rather say angels, Hebrews talks about angels, are not angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who inherit salvation. We've had angels around us all along. But the ghosts, or the angels, showed Scrooge how life could be so much better, giving rather than hoarding. The message got to him to the point that he was so happy he couldn't stop laughing. He told himself they didn't deserve to be so happy. I don't deserve to be so happy. And then he throws his quill in the air, and he says, "But I can't help it. I just can't help it." The joy is there. And at Christmas, we are reminded of the joy that Jesus brings. A happy Christmas, absolutely. Merry Christmas, everyone.

Closing

We certainly thank Don for his message, joy. I think we can experience that joy at this time of year. But in the knowledge of what Jesus has done, that joy should be overflowing as we interact with others this week. Thank Rhonda for her message. Now, Adam, with the kids, the fruit of the spirit. I can't quite keep up with how fast. Love, joy, peace, patience. Well, the reality of Rhonda, she dealt with peace. The peace that we have because of what Jesus did. The reconciliation. So we appreciate her thoughts. And Adam, leading with the children. And Don speaking about joy. So let's go with peace and joy this week. Let's pray.

Dear God, we thank you for the message of the morning. We thank you for your love, which prompted Jesus into this world. We thank you that it was tidings of great joy. And that joy can be part of our lives as we move forward this week. We pray that you will help us take the message with us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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