

Joy
Galatians 5:22-26
Philippians 4:1,4-9

Westminster Presbyterian Church
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Galatians 5:22-26

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

Philippians 4:1,4-9

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

This Summer we're talking about the fruit of the Spirit, the things we should look for, to see where the Holy Spirit is at work in the world. They are the things we should strive for in our own lives, in order to be working with the Holy Spirit.

Last week we spoke about Love. This week we're talking about Joy.

So, think for a minute, what would make you truly happy in life? What would you need to have in your life, that you don't have now, that would bring you happiness, contentment, and joy?

All right, now, are you sure that getting that thing, would bring the joy that you long for?

We all long for joy in our lives, don't we? Even people who say they have given up on finding it keep looking. And looking. And looking.

Many of us answer that first question, what would make us happy, by looking at someone else's life, and saying, "if only my life were like that; if only I had that thing or that relationship in my life..." Advertising has built an entire industry on that desire.

But the truth is that most people, when they let you see their lives, they show you the highlight reel, cropping out the bad stuff. That greener grass over yonder still has weeds in it, when you get close. When we look at our own lives, we see the whole thing, and not just the highlight reel.

And even when we get the thing, the, "if only" thing in our life, we're soon saying, "If only,..."

Does this sound familiar?

I'm not talking here about being clinically depressed. That is a medical problem that should be treated, and it is common enough that I'm sure you all know someone who is affected. I'm talking about people who are always looking for something good only in other people's lives, or who have become cynical, always expecting the worst in their own lives.

The joy Paul is talking about is not the same thing as being happy all the time. Nobody is happy all the time.

Even if you truly have the joy of Christ in your heart, you can grieve losses. You can be sad when the circumstances warrant it. Bad things may happen in your life. Your circumstances

may need to be changed. Refusing to recognize that is called denial, not joy. Denial is not a fruit of the spirit.

So what is Paul talking about? How do we find it?

The joy Paul is talking about here does not come from having the right things, or from being “successful,” however you define “success.” It is not limited to a certain personality type, either a Pollyanna or a life-of-the-party extrovert.

The joy that Paul is talking about is connected to hope. It’s connected to putting things in their proper context. It’s connected to knowing in your heart that, because of what happened on that first Easter, the worst thing is never the last thing.

Ultimately, we know what the ending is to this story. I read ahead to the end. Jesus wins! Good triumphs over evil.

Christians have a reputation in some parts as miserable, grumbling, unhappy, anxious, fearful hypocrites who desperately want to prevent anyone from having any fun. It’s a sad thing that we have so many joyless Christians -- believers who seem to believe that the highest mark of Christian piety is a gloomy face and a mournful voice. If we really believe what we say we believe, and we remember what we believe, then we ought to have joy in our lives.

Now, there’s a problem with that, isn’t there? It’s not so easy to just feel something on command.

You would think that Joy would be the easiest of the fruit of the Spirit – who doesn't want more joy in their life?

But the world keeps trying to beat the joy out of us. We read the paper or turn on the news, and the rule is, "If it bleeds, it leads."

"Bad news on the doorstep," always.

We need to be reminded. Jesus wants us to have genuine joy in our lives.

In John, chapter ten, he says that, "I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of."¹ Later, he says, "I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete."²

So, this is your reminder.

God delights in you.³ Your picture is on God's phone, like pictures of beloved grandchildren.

There is a lot going on in the world right now. A pandemic. Civil unrest coming from centuries of genuine injustice. Deep political, economic, and social divisions. But, even with all that, God still loves the whole world.

Nothing in this world or out of it is powerful enough to get in the way of God's love for us. God's love for us is more powerful than death, or life, or rulers, or anything else in all creation.⁴

¹ John 10:10, *The Message*.

² John 15:11, *Common English Bible*.

³ Isaiah 62:4.

⁴ Romans 8:35-39.

So take heart!

You may be going through a lot right now. Right now, the whole country is going through a lot. No one reasonable is denying that or trying to minimize it.

But remember the context. We know the end of the story.

So no matter what's happening now, we have reason for joy, thank God.

Amen.