

Sermon of Joy

1Thessalonians 5: 16-28

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The scripture I read this morning from Thessalonians was from a letter from the Apostle Paul. He said "Always be joyful. Keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus".

This week we celebrated the 3rd week of Advent by lighting the Candle of Joy. The Joy candle is represented by the pink candle surrounded by the three purple candles. The past two weeks we have lit two of the purple candles representing Hope and Love. The candle this week is special because it is Pink just like the banner that is hanging on the West wall.

In explanation for the Pink candle, this color goes back to the season of Lent in the olden church. A single pink rose was used during the season of Lent. During the Lenten season which precedes Easter, the early church singled out a single Sunday to feast and celebrate the coming joy. Previous to this the Lenten season was marked with fasting so when the pink rose was presented, they knew fasting was over and they could celebrate with a feast.

On this day, the Pope would give out a single pink rose to honor an outstanding citizen. Clergy began to wear pink vestments and decorate the church in pink to mark this day. The candles of Lent were dropped, but 4 candles were retained for Advent including the beautiful pink candle, the candle of joy.

This week we are celebrating the joy of Christ's coming to earth. No matter what color of candle a church displays on that third Sunday, churches want to highlight the importance of joy in advent season. During a time where depression is at an all-time high and people seem to be in the most despair, this candle offers a bright light during a dark time.

The Joy candle is also known as the Shepherd Candle " because of the joy of the shepherds in the field who were told by the angel, "Behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you, who is Messiah and Lord" We feel that joy that the shepherds felt in the birth of the Christ Child.

Sometimes though we can mistake general happiness for joy. The joy we feel today can be far different than the understanding of biblical joy. It goes far beyond momentary happiness like the happiness a child might experience when they unwrap a gift that they'd hoped for on Christmas day.

Biblical joy is extreme happiness that cannot be compared to a joy of receiving a gift or material item. Biblical joy comes from God alone. Joy is experienced when a Christian thinks about salvation, eternal life, or Jesus.

It is an eager anticipation about wonderful things to come. The shepherds experienced this as they ran to Bethlehem to see Jesus.

True Joy is celebrating the birth of the Christ Child at Christmas. Joy is having the shepherds in the stable and the Three Wise men following the star, traveling to Bethlemlen. Joy is lighting the Pink Candle in the advent wreath.

In other words, this week celebrates the joy of Christ's coming to earth.

And that Joy comes directly from God. God fills us with joy and no one can take joy from us .No one has the ability to rob us of our joy. No matter what

happens in this dark world, Jesus is the light of the world who leads us onward. We may experience difficulties in our life, but Jesus is our light even in the darkest moments. .

One of the greatest proponents of Joy in the Bible was Paul. In Philippians 4:4-7 Paul wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say it, Rejoice." When Paul wrote these words, he had been stripped of everything, locked in a cold, dark, and wet prison cell, and had even been sentenced to die. And he sits down to write his friends in Philippi... "Yep... I'm in prison... again... and this time sentenced to die... and oh... by the way... rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again rejoice!"

It's hard to understand how someone in prison waiting to die can write a letter covering 4 chapters in the Bible and mention the word "Joy" ten times..How does he have the strength to say that? How can he keep reminding his friends to "Rejoice in the Lord always." How on earth can he write about joy.

He doesn't have anything to be joyful about. His life is on the line, he is cold, wet, and tired, he has no freedom. He probably isn't given a lot to eat. He is parted from family and friends, and can not take a single bit of joy from a job well done because... well being in prison had put a small damper on his traveling ministry.

Yet over and over again in his letter to the Philippians, Paul brings up joy. Somehow he got it into his head, that you don't need all that stuff to have joy. Even his earthly life being in jeopardy could not part him from joy. You see for Paul... joy does not come from the world... it comes from God. Joy is something you cannot buy, but it comes from something freely given

You see, Paul's greatest joy was his assurance from God. He knew that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is through Christ Jesus our Lord.

This morning we started out the service by lighting the Pink Candle of Joy. We sang Joy to the World, the Lord has come. We had the joy of watching the children of our church express themselves on what they have learned in church and life and we heard about Paul expressing his joy even as he was suffering in prison.

This third week of Advent, let us remember that the good news of Jesus' birth has the power to bring us great joy this Christmas season. Our joy isn't dependent on what is going on in our life, in our world, or the people that we are with. It doesn't depend on the gifts we give or the gifts we find under the tree. No earthly thing can ever give us complete joy. Our joy comes from God. That joy that flooded the hearts of the shepherds, the angels, the wise men, the hosts of heaven, and Mary and Joseph is the joy that still has the power to overwhelm our hearts with rejoicing.

Those who gathered around the new baby were blessed because they believed that God had fulfilled His promises. Mary and Joseph believed and were able to feel the joy of holding baby Jesus in their arms. The shepherds and wise men believed the angels and the signs and experienced the great gladness of worshipping their Messiah.

Those who knew him and recognized him were overjoyed at the coming of Jesus. They saw the prophecies fulfilled and their fear was replaced with happiness as they gazed on the face of the one who would be their Savior. They trusted in God's promises and their hearts were filled with gladness as they watched His loving-kindness manifested in the face of a tiny baby in a lowly manger.

God offers that same joy to us now if we know Him and recognize Jesus as our Savior and Lord. He gave us a reason to celebrate when He gave us the unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to dwell among us. He went to Calvary's cross for us. He overcame death and rose from the dead for us. He forgave our sins and gave us eternal life when we believed in Him.

Our joy doesn't come from our jobs, our family, our relationships, our finances, or our success. Our joy doesn't come from what we have on earth or who we are with. Our joy is a gift. It is the gift that God gave us that first Christmas when Jesus was born. Our joy is encompassed in our Savior. .

Church may not always be thought of as a place to smile or laugh but the church is the place where you come when there is a personal crisis or a national crisis. It's where people come to bring their heaviest burdens to lay down. It's a place where they can feel the weight being lifted from their shoulders. At this time of the year, there are a lot of people who are lost, troubled, sad and fearful about their lives. They are anything but joyful. As we journey closer and closer to Bethlehem, we are reminded about what awaits us when we get there. A savior who can bring us something that no one else can....true joy.

There is a good way to recall the true meaning of Joy and that is to remember the spelling. - J O Y – which means Jesus, first; others second; and yourself last.

So, we need to share our joy. This feeling we have when Jesus works in our lives, when He fixes our issues. That needs to be shared to all around us. I encourage all of you this week to look at your lives, look at the moments where you felt no joy at all, and then see where Jesus came into the picture. Look at how simply His presence in your life changed you. We need to share these stories of anguish and resolution because of Jesus, because without sharing this, those around us who suffer will continue to suffer.

As we take this week to reflect on joy, remember that the only way we can have joy is when we have Jesus Christ present in our lives. We may have many things in this world that make us happy, but nothing brings us joy like the love our of Lord.

True joy can not be packaged and wrapped and put under a tree. It can only be found in the manger and it awaits there for you. Amen and Amen