

“JOY INEXPRESSIBLE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: John 15:4-11; Romans 14:17; I Peter 1:6-9

Introduction.

Someone once quipped that all horses must be Christians because they all have long faces. The atheistic philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche dismissed Christianity saying Christians would have to look more redeemed in order for him to believe there is a redeemer. Too many Christians act like they have been baptized in lemon juice.

Joy is an essential characteristic of a Holy Spirit filled Christian. In fact a joyless Christian is an oxymoron. Are we as Christians more happy and joyful than unbelievers?

What makes you happy? What makes you most unhappy?
What gives you joy? What robs you of joy?

Character of Joy.

Let's begin by clearing up the *difference between happiness and joy*. They are not the same.

Happiness is very predictable, it's found in all the usual places, flowers, ice cream, a kiss, vacations, pay raises, a good grade, a week of sunshine, milk prices going up, obedient kids, baby baptisms, Mother's Day.

Happiness is circumstantial, it's based on what is happening in our lives. Happiness is the absence of anything unhappy, when all is well with our world.

Happiness is elusive. When we chase something temporary, circumstantial, and self-centered, we will never be truly happy or satisfied.

Joy is cut from entirely different cloth. Joy endures where happiness can't. Joy doesn't come from our circumstances, joy shapes our response to our circumstances. Joy is possible when all is not well with our world.

I heard about a godly Christian who was in the hospital being treated for serious cancer and a nurse wrote on his medical chart that he was *inappropriately joyful*. That sounds like a great goal for Christians, to appear to a sad world as inappropriately joyful.

We can have joy without any of the things that make us happy. Joy isn't dependent of things or events. The Christians in the book of Hebrews joyfully accepted the plunder of their possessions knowing that had a better and abiding possession (Hebrews 10:34).

James urges us to consider it all joy when we endure trials of every kind (James 1:2). Hebrews says that Jesus suffered the cross for the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2). Acts reports that Peter and the apostles rejoiced they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake (Acts 5:41). Paul and Silas were heard singing in a prison cell after being beaten (Acts 16:25). I Peter says we can be filled with joy despite the suffering we endure.

This is why motherhood can be a joy in the midst of 3 am feedings, dirty diapers and piles of laundry and dishes.

Biblical joy comes from outside of us, from the Holy Spirit. It's grounded in who God is and what God has done for us in Christ. When we fully grasp the value and significance of our redemption, we will be filled with joy.

This is why there is no true joy in the world outside of salvation. To deny the resurrection or be indifferent about the cross is to deny yourself true joy.

We see joy in Scripture when people come to a knowledge of the truth and respond with faith. The Ethiopian Eunuch and the Philippian Jailer went on their way rejoicing. Jesus came that His joy may be in us and our joy may be full.

Joy and suffering.

One chief characteristic of Christian joy is it can be experienced in suffering and loss.

The way happiness faces problems is not to think about them. It's the old playground trick, stick your fingers in your ears and keep saying, "nahnah, I can't hear you." "I will be happy if I only think happy thoughts."

Christian joy is honest, it can face troubles head on. Why? Because it isn't based on a subjective feelings, it is grounded in an objective reality, anchored in the facts of our faith.

Happiness is made out of sand and any wave can wash it away. Joy is hewn out of solid rock and stands even in the storms of life.

This is not denying reality, this is not denying pain, this is not denying tears. This congregation is marked by all kinds of fears and failures, troubles and heartache. But Christians are able to endure much suffering with joy because they know suffering and pain don't have the final word and they are not purposeless or pointless.

The Christian says, “Yes, pain, I see you, I feel you, I hear you, yes, you are bad, but ...” Nevertheless. In spite of that, ... Joy is bound up with hope that God is present, God is at work and God will bring glory and good.

Christians are not always cheerful and bright, they don’t always have a smile on their face. Bad things happen and we experience the full range of human emotions. There is a time to weep and a time to laugh. We rest in knowledge that God is in control and our salvation in Christ is secure and perfect joy awaits us.

Habakkuk 3:17-18 Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, 18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

Joy is a heavy fruit, not as in sad or hard, but as in weighty, substantive, solid, real. Heavy as in deep, profound. This is joy different than the world knows; to the world it seems inappropriate.

Obstacles to Joy.

What is an obstacle to joy and peace in our homes? *Sin and disobedience*. The same is true in our hearts. The biggest obstacle to joy is our own sin and disobedience. When we are living and acting contrary to how God created us and commanded us, our joy is quenched.

Remember what David prayed after his sin with Bathsheba, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation” (Psalm 51:12). His sin had quenched his joy.

If you lack joy, examine your heart to see if there is any unconfessed sin you need to deal with.

Related to this is *God’s discipline* in our lives. No discipline is pleasant in the moment, but is used by God to produce the fruit of righteousness. God’s discipline can quench our joy. But this can be counter balanced if we remember God disciplines those He loves.

Another joy killer is putting our *hope or confidence in something other than God*. Such as in our flesh, in our own abilities, in our spiritual activities, money, what others think. Anything other than Jesus and His grace is a kind of legalism or works that quenches true joy.

People who are *drinking heavily from the fire hydrant of our culture* are going to have a hard time finding true joy. Acquisition and consumption don’t equal happiness and pleasure and joy.

People pursue money, power and pleasure, they change jobs and marriages, and can't figure out why they are still miserable. We should learn from Solomon's mistakes, he had great power, vast wealth and hundreds of wives, and no joy.

Where did we learn to desire what we desire? Where did we learn what to desire to make us happy? Culture or Christ?

Car companies, cell phones companies, retailers spend billions of dollars every year working hard to influence us, to create desires and wants and wishes, to connect our happiness to their product. Coke Cola spends more on advertising in a year than the GNP of 85 countries in the world.

Our culture's drive for more, for newer, for bigger and better, has actually created a culture in which it is impossible to experience contentment and peace and joy. We live in restless world that can't rest. We live lives that rob us of joy.

Some of you have grounded your happiness and joy in shallow things, that one day will leave you empty and miserable. Don't base your happiness and joy in anything that can be taken or lost.

Many churches have fallen prey to our culture's restless pursuit of new, better, different.

If more is better, if new and improved is better, then contentment and gratitude become elusive, and without contentment and gratitude we won't find joy and rest and peace. The pursuit of more or newer or better or bigger means that joy is always out there in the future.

Who is there who resists the culture, who resists the pressures? Who is free from the bondage?

How do we show that we find our worth and value and joy in Christ rather than stuff?

Cultivating Joy.

As I thought about this third point of our outline, I was struck by the fact that the Bible commands joy, the Bible calls us to be filled with joy, to rejoice, to be glad. Think about that, Christianity is a joyful faith, a religion of joy, that points to a heaven filled with joy, where every tear will be completely wiped away. Jesus came to earth that our joy may be full.

The world paints a gloomy picture of long-faced Christianity because the world doesn't know Jesus and doesn't know the true nature of our faith. Our faith is a singing faith because there is so much to sing about.

We have a *Father* who smiles and laughs, we have a *Savior* who went to weddings and told great stories and who fights for our joy and died to secure our joy in heaven. We have a *Spirit* who cultivates joy in our hearts and enables us to have joy.

The message of the Bible is declared by the angels at the incarnation, “Behold, I bring you good news of great joy.” The Gospel is cause for joy.

When we start talking about ways to cultivate joy in our lives I first remind us that joy is a fruit of the Spirit, it comes from the Spirit by the power of the Spirit. We depend on Him for it.

Since we are commanded to have joy, there is something for us to do, enabled by God’s Spirit.

Is your *name written* in the Lamb’s Book of Life? Let that be cause for joy. The fact that God has given us eternal life is amazing. We should be overwhelmed with joy and gratitude.

Cultivate joy by *confessing sin*, repent, turn from it, and your joy will increase. Forgiveness is cause for joy.

Cultivate joy by trusting in the *promises of God’s Word*. Truth is cause for joy. Jesus used Scripture to restore the joy of the Emmaus Road disciples. Their hearts were set on fire and their joy restored.

Take for example Romans 8:28 which gives us joy in being able to rest in the truth that God is in control and He loves us. If God is at work in every circumstance, then there are in every circumstance the seeds of joy.

Cultivate joy by *taking the long view of life*. Jesus for the joy set out before Him, endured the cross. Your joy is the light at the end of the tunnel. Press on toward that light. Hope is cause for joy.

II Corinthians 4:18 We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Cultivate joy through contentment and gratitude in all circumstances. Not necessarily for all circumstances, but in all circumstances. As we thank God for who He is, what He has done in the past, what He is able to do in all things, for His love, power and grace, we kindle the spark of joy.

Contentment curbs the insatiable appetite for more or better or newer joy stealers.

Cultivate joy in worship. The purpose of joy is to glorify God by demonstrating our faith and trust in God in all circumstances. Make God our greatest desire.

What is the chief end of man? What is our supreme purpose in life? If we know what our supreme purpose is we will find our greatest joy.

The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. When we enjoy God we glorify Him and in that we find our greatest joy.

Psalm 16:11 ... in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Cultivate joy by ***spending time in the presence of children.*** Children are brimming full of overflowing joy. Children aren't encumbered and burdened the way we adults are. They find joy in the simplest pleasures and pursuits. Wealth and power mean little to them.

It is true there are seemingly endless numbers of tasks associated with children, but who would be willing to give that up and miss those countless and often surprising opportunities to experience joy?

Moms and dads, grandparents, slow down, stop and listen, watch and play, cultivate joy by enjoying the joy of children. Learn joy from some of the best joy givers.

Finally, cultivate joy by abiding in Christ. The key to being fruitful and the key to being joyful rests in abiding in the vine who is Christ. Joy is nurtured in our relationship with Jesus.

The Holy Spirit cannot produce fruit on dead or disconnected branches.

John 15:4-5, 11 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Our joy in all circumstances shows to an unbelieving world that we have a loving and faithful heavenly Father who watches over us and cares for us and provides for us in our time of need.

Never underestimate the power of being inappropriately joyful. This sad world of ours will take notice.