



Philippians: Official Guide for a Joy-Filled Life! **“Don’t worry, be happy”**

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday & Sunday, October 10-11, 2020
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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I’ve been reading a lot recently about what people feel may happen in the church going forward in the future. Some are concerned that the habits of worship attendance have been broken, that community connections have been replaced with fear of neighbor, and service opportunities have been curtailed due to virus concerns.

Others see this new normal as a time of potential church growth. Churches are offering online content that they probably should have done years ago, as society increasingly went digital. I know our online service has reached people from all over the country and that is wonderful. Local congregations are seizing the opportunity to impact the world in ways they never could have imagined six months ago.

The staff at Trinity has been having similar conversations for months as we try to navigate this new world in which we live. We understand that life will be different, but we believe and trust in God to lead us where we need to go. We have had our fair share of frustration as well as hope, worries and gratitude.

We have been overwhelmed by your many notes, and emails and letters of support through this crisis. You have lifted us up when the world was down and given us hope as we sought this new path for our ministry. I’m reminded of those words of Paul in his letter to Philippians in Chapter One “Every time I remember you, I thank my God.”

More than ever, we have been comforted by the word of God. We’ve seen and we needed God’s voice to break through to our souls and to speak to us. We heard words of comfort in uncomfortable times, we wondered how to live in light of the resurrection and Covid-19, we sought to learn from the early church and their stories of faithful following and the sharing of the gospel in an unbelieving world.

And for the last four weeks we've read Paul's letter to the Philippians, a congregation he loved, and a congregation that loved him and supported him. He's writing these words of hope and joy from house arrest with the penalty of death over his head. And yet, he's telling the Philippians, "Don't worry about anything."

What robs you of your joy? Is it health, politics, your job, preparing for retirement, relationships, violence, uncertainty, the weather? What worries you? What do you carry with you every single day?

In the fourth chapter of Philippians, Paul is concerned about an ongoing disagreement between two women, Unodia and Sintakey, two leaders in the church of Philippi.

You can see that nothing much has changed in the church in 2000 years. There are bound to be disagreements and church fights between strong people with strong opinions.

We know it must be something significant because Paul puts it in the letter, and it's a matter that is heavy on Paul's heart and he is imploring them to reconcile. The two women, along with the rest of the congregation and crown, his beloved. Paul is being a peace maker for his friends. He knows that there is nothing that hurts more than a breakup with a lover, a friend, a spouse, and he urges them to reconcile and be of one heart.

Paul recognizes that there are differences between people. He doesn't avoid the conflict, but nor does he take sides. He wants to remind them of what they have in common, that they are a part of a community, a church. He wants to foster their togetherness, the fact that they are centered in Christ. That they can find common ground and seek the common good because the mind of Christ is in them.

Grace, forgiveness, mercy, love, peace, joy. These are the things that are on Jesus' mind, on the mind of Christ. He is the source of true joy and inner peace, and in that they can rejoice.

Paul is saying, don't let disagreements or worry or anxiety control or run your life. Don't be overcome with negativity but instead focus on "*whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable.*" Get excited about God and the amazing thing that he is doing in his church. Lives are being transformed! Rejoice in that!

You know, joy is a choice we make. In spite of circumstances, in spite of annoyance, or disagreements or persecution, rejoice Paul says. We decide how

to equip ourselves and to respond to life. We can grumble or we can rejoice. We can be angry, or we can be grateful. We can divide or we can unite. Joy is a hope we embrace.

Benjamin Franklin said, "Do not anticipate trouble or worry about what may never happen. Keep in the sunlight."

Every challenge that we experience in life has a life span. It will not last forever. This too shall pass. God give us the ultimate victory in life and in death. His prize is eternal, and you and I can count on that. Joy is also a place that God gives. Remember all the descriptions of heaven and after life that we see in the Bible? The community of saints, the choirs of angels, the feast of fine wines and good food, the celebration around the throne of the Lamb of God. Our home is a place of heavenly joy!

Joy is near because the Lord is near! He is known through word and sacrament, through your brothers and sisters in Christ, through the church community caring and sharing for each other. This is the prize of life in Christ that the Church proclaims.

We hope for peace in our world. We want peace in our nation. But it all begins with peace in our homes, getting along with our parents and children, our spouses and siblings. Peace in our workplace, caring for colleagues, working with managers and bosses, respecting employees. Peace in our schools; in classrooms and playgrounds and sports fields. Peace in our neighborhoods; loving our neighbors as children of God with whatever political sign they might happen to have in their yard, or the God that they worship.

Notice in Paul's letter peace comes to us through prayer. You talk and you connect with God and Christ, the Prince of Peace, your heart to his heart. You pray and open yourself up to experience God's peace, a peace that passes all understanding.

I can't explain that to you, but I have felt it in my own life deep in my soul. I've been through the valley of the shadow of death, and I've experienced Christ with me and in me, and I wouldn't trade it for anything else in the whole wide world.

The Lord is near, and you can rejoice today, tomorrow and through whatever life brings, because of it.

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

In the name of the Father and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.