

JOY? DELIGHT? REJOICING?

We are celebrating this third Sunday in Advent and have lit the candle representing JOY. The questions for us today are *do we have joy? Do we delight in anything? Are we ever rejoicing over someone or something? Where do you find that “special moment” as the old Kodak song celebrated?* And are such times **only** moments or it is something that lasts much longer?

What is interesting here is that if you look for a definition of these words, **joy**, **delight**, and **rejoice**, you will discover that each can be defined by the other. Like *love*, these words may be overused or even wrongly used by many. Their meanings become so diluted that like the word, *love*, they can be used in any context to love, rejoice, delight or be joyful about.

We have been on this journey of Advent for three weeks now, preparing for the birth of Jesus Christ. These words should hold special meaning for us as disciples, and especially at this time of the year. As his disciples we are to be different. As disciples our world view is vastly different from the society we live in. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples in John 15:19 *“the world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you.”*

Could that be the reason that people may not see us as *no different* than anybody else? We do not like to admit here at church that maybe culture has seeped into the church more than we want to acknowledge. A church can become just like a business. NO, the church is a living body, and functions on a different level. Prayer, patience and service are trademarks of a church. We do not exist for profit. We exist to profit others by having them know god and having a relationship with Jesus Christ. These are only a few examples to show how different as disciples we are to be. Then is it any big jump to say that there are words that carry a special meaning for us? One of the most common, sadly, is how the very name of Jesus Christ is used in slang phrases of swearing, and as the saying goes – “words do matter”. (*friend in a cab story*)

When words matter, the reason goes back to our “dictionary” the Bible. For in the Bible we can find the true meaning of words and the importance of applying them to our spiritual walk, whether it is Advent, Christmas, Easter or any day for that matter!

During this Advent season we have been searching already for the ways in which the words of Advent can be used in our daily lives. We have looked at hope, which for us carries a very different meaning than for most of the world, last week we found *peace* to be much more than the world expects and this week we look at joy in a much the same way – different than most of the world.

If we really study the words of the Bible we can discover a way of life that leads to *joy*, and *rejoicing*. Only trouble is many people do not spend any time in their Bible, it has been on the shelf or in the drawer or even worst in a box since confirmation.

There is that saying about insanity and doing something over and over again and expecting different results!!! If that is true then why do we expect our lives to improve, have all this joy, peace and hope if we use the same excuses over and over again for not seeking?

Many think “if only I had more money things would be so much better”. If that is true then how come when you visit people that don’t have much, there is a *hope, peace and joy* there along with the willingness to share? And how come some people who seem to “have it all” commit suicide? Or turn to drugs or whatever. Don’t be deceived, the Bible cautions to not “*love the things of this world*”. The stories one can read about the money pursued and spent in the name of happiness is truly a tragedy.

There was a book written awhile back by Richard Foster called *Money, Sex and Power* and the relationships between them. Foster puts forth example after example of failure and disappointment in such pursuits. Again, the Bible gives us the answers, the truth, to find those things that are lasting and give joy, and cause us to rejoice whether it be outwardly or quietly inwardly.

Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise god in every situation. Now if we take this definition and look at its parts we can better understand and realize *joy* is something that is within our grasp. It is a gift and fruit of the spirit.

In Romans we are told we are all gifted for his purposes. God desires for us to have these gifts and use them!!! What is sad is that for many they never search in the right place for what they already possess. How many, if li asked you this morning, would be able to answer the question “*what is your spiritual gift?*” The reason it is so important is that when you know your gift, then you can function and serve in an area where you can best use that gift. Then, your *joy* will be complete!!!

God desires joy-filled disciples. Just think back to the tragic endings to many of his disciples and saints through the ages. These men and women went to their death with an inner joy, a peace that indeed passed all understanding. Go back to that definition of joy I gave a few minutes ago - *joy* is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation. Those disciples and saints had it right, *joy*, down to the end.

Can you imagine living a life like that? Remember these people were only ordinary people like you and me, but when they knew the truth, knew their gift and used it in service to others – **that is the “secret” to joy.** And we all know it. It’s in our book – the Bible.

Why take up our time with matters that when we are gone won't be remembered, in fact they may not be remembered tomorrow!!! I am reminded of some of the lines from the poem "The Dash" - *what matters is how we live and love and how we spend our dash...so, think about this long and hard. Are there things you'd like to change? For you never know how much time is left that can still be rearranged...if we could just **slow down enough** to consider what's true and real and always try to understand the way other people feel. ..and **show** appreciation more and love the people in our lives like we've never loved before.*

In that poem's lines are the things when done will bring *joy, delight, and rejoicing* in our lives. For many of us whether in childhood or as adults, we remember with the passing of time, not the gifts, but people we gathered and shared with. Gifts break or wear out with time. In Matthew 6 we are reminded "*don't store up treasures here on earth*" and in my words will break or wear out. Think about this parents and grandparents – what can you give that will last? Give of yourself and the wisdom of age. How many gifts given hold attention for only a short time? And how many times have you heard despite being surrounded by numerous gadgets "I'm bored".

One the biggest reasons Christmas is so commercialized is US! We can blame all the advertising we want, but we do have the choice whether to, literally, back into it! Now if I sound like the Grinch that stole Christmas, not really? Stop for a moment and ponder who really has "stole" Christmas, crushed the true spirit and meaning of this holy day, not holiday.

Now that we have stated what *joy, delight and rejoicing* are not, what and where do we find these things? Today's reading from First Thessalonians is a strong start. Remember this guy named Paul was a prisoner, shipwrecked, stoned and beaten, yet he is telling us "*to rejoice and again I say rejoice!*" The man is an authority when it comes to speaking on *joy, delight and rejoicing* despite and in difficult circumstances.

Paul actually encourages us in Verse 15 with these words "*make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.*" Then in Verse 16 "*rejoice always*". He goes on to list things we can do to find true *joy, delight and be able to rejoice*. "*pray without ceasing*" – *we can if our life is a continuous conversation with God!* "*in everything give thanks*" a *life of gratitude makes that possible and real*. "*do not quench the spirit*" – *simply when God is prompting you to do something – do it!!!* "*hold fast to that which is good*" - echoes of John Wesley -do good. "*abstain from every form of evil*" the "*joy*" of evil lasts only a brief time, but the consequences can last a lifetime! I will say this again, God does not leave us without a helper – the Holy Spirit and not without a guide – the Bible, better than any self-help or self-improvement book ever written.

The word *joy* is used well over one hundred times in the Bible. On your insert in your bulletin are just a few of the verses concerning *joy, delight, and rejoicing* and the ways in which we can find it.

In closing John Newton, the writer of the most popular hymn in history, "Amazing Grace" said:

"... if two angels in heaven were given assignments by God at the same time, one of them to go and rule over the greatest nation on earth and the other to go sweep the streets of the dirtiest village, each angel would be completely indifferent as to which one got which assignment.

It simply wouldn't matter to them. Why? Because the real *joy* lies in being obedient to God. For a Christ follower, the important thing isn't what God has us doing; the important thing is that we're doing what God wants us to do."

May we all find that *joy*, delight in it and rejoice over it.

Amen.