

JOY



Sunday, December 13, 2015

Psalm 127; Zephaniah 3:16-17

“Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one’s youth.
Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them.”

Psalm 127:3-5, nrsv

Shelly and I had no idea how quiver-full we’d be when we got married, but along with our three boys came many happy times! Times like my one-year-old first born son and me laughing hysterically when he, for the first time, did to his mom what I’d been secretly teaching him to do whenever I fed him baby food peas: spit them out on her! Or like the sound of our first and second sons giggling together from their bedroom at night after our second had been moved to a “big boy bed” in his brother’s room. Times like the sound of two older brothers laughingly picking on their baby brother – and baby bro laughing at the joy of being the object of his brothers’ attention (and later, the different kind of laughter when he got them back). I’m looking forward to hearing their laughter when they all plan to be home this Christmas.

That word “happy” in Psalm 127:5 can be translated “blessed,” “joyful,” and even “jubilant.” That has been true for us (it’s important to note that the original language that is translated “sons” can just as easily be “children,” so it’s not tied to a gender). I think of the joy the Father had when He heard Jesus, the baby, laugh for the first time. I think of the joy the Father has when He thinks of us:

“He will take great delight in you;
in His love He will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.”
Zephaniah 3:17, niv

Pastor Mike

Monday, December 14, 2015

Every Christmas, children and families of our church go to a few of the nursing homes in Yakima to sing Christmas carols. This year we are going on Wednesday, December 16, if you want to join us. After we sing some carols we visit with the residents, learn their names, get to know them a little bit, and give them candy canes. One of the best parts about singing is inviting everyone else to sing with us. The louder they are, the less I can hear myself sing, which is always a good thing. Last year Alyssa and I took Judah and Jordan with us. Judah tried singing a few songs, but my favorite part of the night was watching him tell others, "Merry Christmas!" Instead of saying "hello" and "goodbye" to others, he said, "Merry Christmas!" over and over again all night. Most of the adults were shocked he was even talking to them. I saw the adults' faces light up as Judah acknowledged them, smiled at them and/or gave them a candy cane.

Parents' faces light up when they see their children. Joseph and Mary's faces no doubt lit up that night long ago as Jesus lay in a manger. Jesus would be the true source of joy in not just their lives, but in the lives of everyone in the entire world. This kind of joy is not limited to just December, but can be with us all year. God's love for us never leaves, nor does the joy that He brings into our lives. Does thinking about Jesus make you want to sing (even if you aren't a good singer, like me)? Does thinking about Jesus get your face to light up?

"Shout to the Lord, all the earth; break out in praise and sing for joy!"

Psalm 98:4

Pastor Casey Wilkerson



Tuesday, December 15, 2015

John 3:28-30; John 15:9-17; Philippians 2:1-11

Joy is not circumstantial. Joy, as described by Jesus and John the Baptist is more consistent with a state of being. Neither Jesus nor John described joy as limited to being “happy” although happiness is a wonderful aspect of joy. Both Jesus and John talked about joy becoming complete. Paul describes this as well in Philippians 2.

Perhaps we can catch a glimpse of this state of joy and its “completion” as we watch our young children, grandchildren and great grandchildren become increasingly more eager and excited as Christmas approaches. They display an expectant hope of something wonderful looking toward its completion when gifts can finally be opened.

John the Baptist in John 3 describes this spiritual reality in just such an expectant manner. We look to Christmas as the fulfillment of God’s promise of a Savior. Joy to the world indeed! But our joy could only become complete when our Savior, Jesus Christ, conquered death on the cross and through His resurrection completed the reconciliation with God that His birth alone would not fulfill.

“You yourselves can testify that I said,
‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’

The bride belongs to the bridegroom.

The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him,
and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice.

That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

He must become greater; I must become less.”

John 3:28-30

In John 15 Jesus tells us how we can remain in His love and how our joy can be complete. We need to be demonstrators of Christ’s attitude through selfless acts of love and humility.

This wonderful time of Christmas should remind us that our Savior’s joy is complete when He sees His friends being Jesus throughout this holiday season and the New Year which follows.

Merry Christmas and a completely Joy-filled New Year.

Scott Williams

Wednesday, December 16, 2015

The time was winter 2014. The place was the summit of White Pass. Rachael and I decided to take Riley (4) and Brinley (8 months) up into the woods to find and bring home our first “real” family Christmas tree. The goal was to start a tradition that we could repeat each year as a family for years to come. The excitement on a scale of 1-10 was a solid 12. Riley and I set out into the forest as Rachael hung back in the vehicle to feed Brinley. Riley probably located over 20 trees that were “the one”. He would run through the snow up to a tree and ask, “Dad, dad, is this the one!?!? Oh yeah, this is the one!!!” I would explain, “No, this one can’t be the one because it is 15 feet tall and we only have 9 foot ceilings...” I would then locate one that had potential, but still wasn’t quite what I had in mind. It turns out that in the forest they don’t grow like you see at the makeshift parking lot tree stands that are full of farm grown perfectly full Christmas Trees that are arranged in various heights. In the forest most look like the Charlie Brown Christmas Tree. Nevertheless, Riley and I were having a blast! Just being in the mountains in the fresh cool air and getting to play in the snow, me with him and him with me, was pure Joy. Joy that I received from my boy and he received from me, his father.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him,
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 15:13

Steven J. Stilley



Thursday, December 17, 2015

The word family doesn't always make you think of the happiest things. You love them to death, but family always knows how to hit that one bad nerve. Whether it's a bad tone of voice when someone asks you to do the dishes, or your wife had a bad day at work and is in a bad mood so everything you say upsets her, or your sister wore your dress without asking, family just gets on your nerves. However, like me you can probably think of a time like this: my family and I were sitting in a hotel room eating low quality pizza and just laughing at each other's bad jokes. We didn't really know why everything was so funny; we just knew that we were together and that we were happy. We had a joy in our hearts.

Sometimes the things that can bring us the most frustration are also the things that bring us the most joy. God gives us joy in many different ways every day, we just have to be open to seeing the things that are meant to bring us that joy. Sometimes it's family, or friends, or just the knowledge that we have a God who loves us. Sometimes it's something big, but sometimes the little things we take for granted are the things that God sends our way. Either way, God always gives us some reason to be joyous. So look for the little things. They are always there.

Julissa Peart



Friday, December 18, 2015

So Much Joy

“...for the Joy of the Lord is your strength.”
Nehemiah 8:10

Stress! Oncology nursing at the hospital was transitioning to computers and I was not computerized! Our little grandson, Peter, had been diagnosed with Autism and his parents needed time to prepare for his mom to stay home. I was juggling my hours at work, trying to help out, and my “solid as a rock” husband, on whom I depend, was frequently out of town. Early morning prayers had become brief cries for help, “Just get us through this day, Lord”, no time to listen or look to His Word for answers.

After realizing that Peter could no longer stay in daycare, his mom called. She'd been crying. “Have you thought about retiring?” I was sure thinking about it now! “I'll call you back.” I bowed my head, “Dear Lord, forgive me for not listening earlier. I'm listening now. Help me.” I truly felt the weight of Peter vs. Career balancing like a scale in my hands. God put the balance of His favor on Peter, and the weight of this decision fell off my shoulders. Joy and peace flooded my soul. Amazing! Thank you, Lord!

We had three unforgettable, joy-filled years together. That first year was very difficult, especially for Peter. But joy isn't about being easy. It's intentional on our part, lasting, and God-sent. Those difficult days became fewer and fewer and were replaced with many days of laughter and contentment.

Today, well, Peter is an eleven-year-old joy-spreader. In fact, he can be heard making a joyful noise most any day, most anywhere.

Whatever our future holds, we have joy everlasting because of Jesus...Joy unspeakable and full of His Glory.

Ruth Nordstrom

Saturday, December 19, 2015

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,
whenever you face trials of many kinds,
because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”
James 1:2-3

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him,
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”
Romans 15:13

“Everyone enjoys a fitting reply;
it is wonderful to say the right thing at the right time!”
Proverbs 15:23

Will you allow God to use you and be the joy to someone else?

I encountered some extreme challenges in my professional career as our company's General Manager this past year. Experiencing incidents where one long-term colleague committed suicide and another embezzled funds made it extremely difficult to “consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.” It was yet another reminder on how important it is to maintain a relationship with our trustworthy Christ.

The ripple effect throughout our organization was felt hard, but opportunities to discuss taboo subjects with everlasting spiritual consequences became common place. God has placed several individuals in my path, allowed fantastic conversations and mentorship opportunities to transpire. To be honest, I reluctantly participated in these opportunities initially, but have found complete joy as new relationships blossom. The joy of Christ has been my strength.

David Dunham

