

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church

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“On Remaining Joyful”

Series: "Finding Joy Right Where You Are"

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Philippians 1:12-26

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qON-tfK_X2w&t=1s

A man visited a number of churches after he decided he was going to “get religion”. He visited the first church and after doing so, his house burned down. He visited the next, the following week, he lost his business. The next week, he visited another church and his wife left him. After that he said, “Thank God, I found my sort of Church.”

We all need a place to belong. The need to belong is a deep human need. It reaches to the very depths of our soul. For it contains within it our need for acceptance, affirmation and affection.

I knew a woman whose mother had died. She told me that though she had few regrets, yet now she was nobody’s child. Some feel the loneliness of being nobody’s child because of bereavement, others by estrangement. It is said that one quarter of our population lives alone. Many of them want to. They love it, and have no wish to change it. Many others can hardly bear it. Loneliness is a fatal affliction for some. We have statistics to prove that there are far more suicides among people who live alone, and who find themselves not only alone but lonely, than among others who enjoy some sort of companionship.

Jean Vanier has said that “loneliness is a feeling of not being part of anything, of being cut off. It is a feeling of being unworthy, of not being able to cope in the face of a universe that seems to work against us.” People can be unfriendly, frustrating and foolish—accept them anyway.

This need for acceptance, affirmation and affection is a universal need. That is why we need to tread softly, for we tread on people dreams.

W.B. Yeats wrote it this way

Had I the heaven's embroidered cloths
Inwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams

St. Paul understood this because he experienced the betray and brutality of people and yet, in Philippians 1:12-26, we see that though he mentions some very negative things that were going on in his life – an unfriendly, environment, unpleasant circumstances, unreasonable people, and his uncertain future – Paul goes on to show that God was able to use those negative things in a very positive way.

A poet puts it this way:

"One ship drives east, another drives west with the same winds that blow.
'Tis the set of the sails and not the gales which determines the way we go,"

It was because of his relationship with Christ, that he was about to set his sails in the turbulent waters of life.

I

St. Paul remained joyful in the face of an **unfriendly environment** because of his desire to *do good anyway*. In vs. 12 he says, "*Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.*"

Paul is saying, "All these things that have happened to me have resulted in clearing the way so that the gospel might be preached more effectively." He says, "As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard & to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ."

Paul's desire was that the people might be blessed and that they would come to know, love and serve the Lord. And that they might experience the beauty and the majesty of the Lord in their lives. And he was willing to endure anything for fulfill that purpose.

When I think of this I'm reminded of the words of Stephen Spender who said,

I think continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light where the hours are suns
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the Spirit clothed from head to foot in song...

...Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog the flowering of the spirit...

The names of those who in their lives fought for life
Who wore at their hearts the fire's center.
Born of the sun they traveled a short while towards the sun,
And left the vivid air signed with their honor.

Do you remember Kathleen Ferrier? She was a superb contralto, much beloved, who died of cancer while still a young woman. She was once rehearsing Mahler's "*Das lied von der Erde*" with Bruno Walter when the beauty and pathos of the words and music overwhelmed her. She couldn't go on and the conductor had to call a break in the rehearsal. Miss Ferrier apologized to

Bruno Walter, but he replied “Kathleen, you have nothing for which to apologize we should have all been weeping.”

“For this reason I endure all things that they may obtain Christ Jesus, and eternal glory.”

That was why he was willing to endure all because it was his desire to change lives. His desire was to make an eternal difference. He was passionate in his proclamation of the Gospel. It was because He knew it to be true. And that it could change lives.

II

St. Paul remained joyful in the face of an unfriendly environment, and secondly, **unpleasant circumstances** and yet he remained *positive anyway*.

One Sunday morning a man in the middle of the sermon got up and walked out. The poor minister was completely distraught by this and said to the wife of the man, “What happen? Do you think I said something wrong?” And she said, “Oh, don’t worry about it. He didn’t disagree with anything you said, he just has a tendency to walk in his sleep.”

In verse 14, Paul said, *“I want you to know brethren that what has happened to me has turned out for good, for it has become known to all the guards and the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ and many have become encouraged and bold in proclaiming the word of God without fear.”*

Paul was reminding us that nothing can stand in the way of the will or the word of God.

Jesus Himself said that if these disciples were to stop speaking, the stones would shout and declare His glory.

One person said it this way. He said there are

Tongues in trees.

Books in the running brooks

Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

William Blake tells us that when he looked at the sun, what he saw was not merely a golden circle, but an innumerable company of heavenly host praising God and saying, “Holy Holy Holy Lord God almighty, heaven and earth are full of your glory...”

Or as the old hymn has said,

This is my Father’s world

And to my listening ears

All nature sings and round me rings

the music of the spheres.

God’s glory is declared in nature, but also, through human nature.

There were four clergymen who were discussing the merits of the various translations of the Bible. One liked the King James Version best because of its simple, beautiful English.

Another liked the American Revised Version best because it is more literal and came nearer to the original Hebrew and Greek. Still another minister liked the Moffat translation because of the up-to-date vocabulary. The fourth minister was silent. When asked to express his opinion, he replied, "I like my mother's translation best." The other three expressed surprise. They did not know that his mother had translated the Bible. But he assured them, "She translated it into life, every day of her life, and it was the most convincing translation I ever saw."

III

St. Paul remained joyful in the face an unfriendly environment, unpleasant circumstances and thirdly, **unreasonable people –and he accepted them anyway.**

In vs. 15 he says, *"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will...what then do we do—notwithstanding whether in presence, or in truth as long as Christ is preached; I therefore will rejoice"* And then goes on to say it again to emphasis the point, *"I will rejoice."*

Pepper Rogers was having an awful year coaching his team. Everywhere he would go people were condemning him for the job he was doing. Everyone -- family, friends and neighbors -- were disgusted with the way the team was playing and how he was coaching. Finally, after a particularly awful day where nothing went right, he came home and said to his wife in hopes of some comfort and acceptance, "Darling, I've only got one friend in the world and I need two." So she went out and bought him dog. Now that's cruel and cold.

What do we do when we become angry at or envious of someone else? We usually try to tear them down. We point out all the negative things we can about that person, thinking that by pulling them down, we're building ourselves up.

Paul didn't do that. He accepted them anyway. He accepted those people who didn't like or agree with him, or were envious of him anyway. He accepted them for where they were in their life and their walk with the Lord. He did this because he was more concerned with Christ being proclaimed then dealing with his circumstance, their criticisms or complaints about himself.

For four decades East Berlin was controlled by the Communists. West Berlin was free. One day some people who lived in East Berlin took a truckload of garbage and dumped it on the West Berlin side. The people of West Berlin could have retaliated by doing the same thing. But instead they took a truckload of canned goods, bread, and milk and neatly stacked it on the East Berlin side. On top of this stack of food they placed the sign: "Each gives what he has." You think about that. Amen.