

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church
By the Rev.Capt Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

"Joy and Woe"

Philippians 1:12-18

Series: "Finding Joy Right Where You Are"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1AgBvQeWu0>

January 29, 2023

Life is a mixture of good and bad, happiness and sadness, laughter and loss. We all would like to avoid the pain and the crises in life. Yet, the irony for most of us is that we learn the most valuable things during the most trying times. Have you ever heard someone say, "I wouldn't go through that again, if you paid me a million dollars? But I wouldn't trade what I learned for anything."

Keats says that "this world is a vale of soul making." And he is write we are matured and molded in the midst of all that happens to us. Life can make us, or break us. It really depends on how we face life's adversity.

Blake said it this way,

Joy and woe are woven fine
A clothing of the soul divine
And when this we rightly know
Through the world we safely go.

Joy and woe are woven fine. Life can be hard and lonely. Life can knock the wind right out of you. It can take you by surprise and spin you around and cause you to be lost and disoriented.

St. Paul understood this. There his was, sitting in a prison, having been beaten, charged and falsely accused. Yet, he spoke of the events as if they were nothing in themselves. "These things that have happened to me..." They were of no import. What was happening to him was not as significant as what was happening in him and through him. "These things" were not even worth mentioning. There just, "these things." He had a way of looking at life that made the difference.

Seneca once said, "the heaviest burdens to bare bring the sweetening memories to remember."

Think of it this way--do you remember when you were young and just starting out? And all the adventure and adversity of life was before you. And in those early days where you struggled to make ends meet, and someday you wondered if you were every going to be able to cope. And you thought that if one more things goes wrong you would not be able to cope. And

then it did, and you did. Do you remember the days where you didn't know how you were going to pay the rent and you scrimped and saved for every dime? And now as you look back at those times you do so remembering the sweetness of it. The closeness of those moments. And how you drew closer together and closer to Him.

"These things..." These things...there not what you think...really they have turned out for our good." Paul understood that the heaviest burden to bare brings the sweetest memory to remember."

I

Paul reminds us, that when we come up against adversity we must look to the **Lord**. Paul could have given up in despair. He could have given way to bitterness. He could have raised his hand in rage. However, he raised his voice in a choir of praise to the Lord. He said, "...rejoice in the Lord..." Why? Because he had the Lord.

In the United Church we sometime find it hard to speak about our relationship with Jesus. We struggle while the evangelicals find it their strength. We find it easier to respond with good works, they find it easier to speak about their relationship with Jesus. Neither is wrong. Yet, one allows us to experience what the scriptures state, "the joy of the Lord is my strength". Rather than being "weary in well-doing". It is the Martha Mary struggle. When Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus and Martha angrily said "well these dishes aren't going to clean themselves Mary. Tell her Jesus." And Jesus said, "Martha, I'm only here a short time. Mary has chosen the better portion."

Now, doesn't that just tick the United Church in you off! And yet, relationships are hard work. Not just work. And they require attention. Especially, if you are going to depend on them in the hard times.

"You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" (Revelation 2:3-5).

We're obsessed with our phones; a new study has found. The heaviest smartphone users click, tap or swipe on their phone 5,427 times a day, according to researchers.

That's the top 10 percent of phone users, so one would expect it to be excessive. However, the rest of us still touch the addictive things 2,617 times a day on average. No small number.

The research firm, which specializes in consumer reactions to products, recruited 94 Android device users and installed special software on their smartphones. The tool tracked each user's "interaction" over five days, all day, the company says in a blog post on its website.

"And by every interaction, we mean every tap, type, swipe and click. We're calling them touches," it explains.

Averaging out the numbers, the aforementioned figures mean the heaviest users are touching their devices a couple of million times in one year, Dscout says.

Probably the most interesting thing in all this was that the people surveyed completely underestimated their phone touching. While they were initially shocked by the numbers, 41 percent said "it probably won't change the way I use my phone."

How many taps, types, swipes and clicks take place between you and the Lord in a day?

If the number of times you were in contact with Jesus on a daily basis could be tracked, would you be shocked by the result? Would it be because of how *often*, or, how *infrequently* you reached out to Him?

"Come near to the Lord and he will come near to you..." (James 4:8).

II

Paul reminds us, that when we come up against adversity we must look to the Lord. Doing so we will as St. Paul see the lesson.

Dylan Thomas wrote a poem called "And Death Shall Have No Dominion." In it, he declares that death shall have no dominion because, "while lovers be lost love shall not." It sounds not only defiant, but triumphant. Then we remember that if those we love be lost, death has dominion enough. Caitlin, the wife of Dylan Thomas understood this when Dylan died. She wrote a book and called it "Leftover Life to Kill". She felt hopeless.

I was asked to conduct a funeral a few years back and I arrived early to meet with the family. I said hello to the Priest who had just finished conducting the previous funeral as he was leaving. As I entered the office of the funeral home, I was greeted with a lady screaming and crying, saying, "He is alive, he is alive!" She began to run frantically in circles screaming, "He is alive. I just talked to him."

The funeral directors explained to me, as the noise in the chapel began to grow in strength and become louder and louder that the man in the coffin that they just had a full funeral service for was not related to the family. And that, even though the man looked something like the man in the picture the man who they thought was dead was actually in the living room of his sister having tea.

They didn't know what to do. Everyone was screaming at them every time they stepped out of the office. So I walked in the middle of the crowd and said. "Shut Uppppp! Why are you crying and yelling at the Funeral Director? This man you thought was dead is alive! Go celebrate and give thanks and live and love like you have never done before for you have faced death and overcome it...and make sure to go to church on Sunday and give thanks." Some started laughing and clapping. Then I said, "Now, get out of here and stop bugging me. I have a service to perform."

One of the things about travelling by car long distances, is that no matter what, you always get into construction. And I mentioned before I saw a sign say "the road to happiness is almost always under construction."

The same applies not only to the roads themselves but to our lives and the lives that we lead. It is one that had detours and difficulties, pot holes and problems and it is not always smooth.

St. Teresa says, simply, "everything is grace." If this is true; then the good gifts are grace, because they are a part of everything-- but then suffering is grace, because it is something. This very hard to accept. For most of us everything in us wants to refuse this fact. We don't want to accept that God could be allowing some suffering in our lives--not that suffering comes from God, but He allows it--to occur so to work out His purpose-- His will in us. So everything remains grace only in the hands of God. It is grace only as it calls us to God.

Look again a Paul. There he was in prison, having been chained, and beaten. Then he says, "I want you to know brethren, that what has happened to me, has really actually turned out

for the furtherance of the gospel." He is saying, even this is grace. Not only for him, but for others.

We have all heard it said, "no pain, no gain". And it is true. Each week I go and try to work out in a gym. And every time I go there, I see people in pain. And I'm one of them. And every day, I try to convince myself that this is good pain. Someone said that to me. They said, "But John there are different times of pain, and this is good pain." I looked at him. and said, "What Psych ward were you just let out of. "Good pain!?" He was right.

We all know a physical workout produces pain because the muscles are being stretched to their limit. This is a gift to the body, for it produces greater strength and health. It is the same for the spiritual as the physical. God allows the pain to come into our life, to produce a greater spiritual gain for our life.

III

Paul looked to the Lord and then he could look for the lesson, and finally he looks for ways to **lift**. The bad times are for God's people, but God's people are also, for bad times. So stop being anxious and start getting into action.

St. Thomas More once said, "the times are never so bad that a good man cannot live in them." We know we live in difficult times. This message shouts to us from the T.V and screams to us from our newspapers. As parents and grandparents it is frightening to think of what is out there for our children. We fear for their safety, their survival, and their very souls. And often we wonder if we can be whole, healthy and holy in this life.

We live in difficult times. We are in bad times. But "the times are never so bad that a good man or woman cannot live in them." And I would add, and that the times are never so bad that a good and godly person cannot make a difference by living in them.

When I say this, I think of Thomas More, who was a man for all seasons for he stood for truth, though others lived in lies. He was one who sided with what was right, though others choose to sell their souls. He made a difference, just because he decided to make a stand.

Hody Childress was a farmer living off his meager retirement savings in the small town of Geraldine, Ala. "I told him, 'Yes, unfortunately that happens often,'" recalled Walker, 38. "And he handed me a \$100 bill, all folded up." He told her to use it for anyone who couldn't afford their prescriptions. "He said, 'Don't tell a soul where the money came from – if they ask, just tell them it's a blessing from the Lord,'" he said. When Childress died on New Year's Day at age 80, Walker said she decided to let his family know about the donations that had helped several hundred people in the farming community, located about 60 miles from Huntsville. As the years went on, Childress's \$100 bills added up to thousands of dollars, she said, noting that she was usually able to help two people a month who didn't have insurance or whose benefits wouldn't cover their medications. At the same time that Walker was thinking of calling Hody Childress's family, his daughter, Tania Nix, was preparing to let people know about her father's generosity at his Jan. 5 funeral.

He had confided in her about his pharmacy donations before his death, she said. "He told me he'd been carrying a \$100 bill to the pharmacist in Geraldine on the first of each month, and he didn't want to know who she'd helped with it – he just wanted to bless people with it," said Nix, 58.

Her father was an Air Force veteran who had his share of hardship, she said, noting that her brother and People in Geraldine who hope to keep that legacy going are now dropping by the drugstore with donations of their own, Walker said.

“We’re calling it the Hody Childress Fund, and we’re going to keep it going as long as the community and Hody’s family wants to keep it alive,” she said.”

<https://torontosun.com/news/world/after-a-farmer-died-his-town-learned-he-secretly-paid-strangers-pharmacy-bills>

Mother Teresa said, “We can not all do great things. But we can all do little things with great love... you think about that!