

April 26, 2020

Welcome to Germantown Church of God in Cascade, MD. I am Pastor Mark Hosler, pastor of Germantown Church and I am glad that you have joined me today for this video message. We are continuing to go through this time when we have been instructed to “Stay Home and Stay Safe” in order to protect ourselves and others. The Covid 19 virus is real and is very dangerous. While this Quarantine time is difficult and maybe frustrating, we will continue to follow the directives of the government authorities. Face to face meetings will be suspended. We don’t know how long this is going to last. We will continue to pray for patience and God’s grace to sustain us through this time.

When we are confined to our homes, I continue to encourage you to use this time as a time of spiritual growth. Read, pray, reflect. I would be anxious to hear what you are learning, what God may be showing you through His word. You can share those thoughts on our Facebook page, or email me. I encourage you to pray for others. Call and check in. Pray together. We have a Conference Call Prayer Gathering on Thursday evenings at 7:00. I would be glad to have you join us for that. You can private message me or call me for information about how to call in and participate in that Prayer gathering.

I do encourage you to invite others to watch these video messages. If you are comfortable doing so, you can invite others to join you to watch the messages. If you know someone who does not use the internet, you may be able to take a device to them so they can watch the messages. Of course, follow these guidelines when you are doing so: practice social distancing, wear a mask, avoid shaking hands

Invitation to Worship: Psalm 85

Isaiah 26:2 – *You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.*

Last week we began talking about some of the words that we might use to describe a Christian. We might say that those who have embraced Jesus as their Savior, who are His followers would be people whose lives are characterized by Faith. We might expect them to be people who are filled with joy, or love, or peace, or hope. But in difficult times, Faith may be hard. It may be hard to experience Joy, or Love, or Peace, or Hope. Does the Bible have anything to say to us about these characteristics and maintaining these qualities in difficult days so that we can be a good witness and encouragement to others.

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:4-9

Message: As we have witnessed this pandemic unfold since January, we have become aware of the impact all of this has had on our physical bodies, our emotions and our soul. It has been difficult for some people to find some spiritual equilibrium. Some people have been able to stay energized, to find things to do. But for some people it may be difficult to get up, to get moving to use our time well. One of the emotions that has risen up and just been devastating to our spirit is **sadness**. It has been hard to experience any joy. The news and stories have been difficult to watch. Some evenings when watching the news, I have felt overwhelmed with sadness by the stories Reports state that we have passed the number of 50,000 deaths because of Covid-19, over the past 4 months. The stories of how this disease has devastated Nursing Homes has been especially sad. It seems as if the virus spread through those long-term care facilities like wild fire. The residents are already vulnerable, and

not able to fight off the virus. Staff are then exposed. Because visitation in those facilities has been shut down, families have lost loved ones without being able to be with their mother or father, or grandparent, haven't had the opportunity to say goodbye. I have a dear friend who died last week in a hospital (Not Covid related). In ordinary times I would have been able to visit him in the hospital and spend some time with him in his final days. But I could not do that. It was sad for me to hear that he had died, and I'm sure it was much more sad for his wife and family. Health care workers have exposed themselves to the virus in order to care for those infected. Many doctors, nurses, aides, housekeeping staff became infected and died. So Sad. Being isolated from those we love has been a source of sadness. In the last month, my father-in-law spent several days in the hospital – not because of Covid-19 – and we were not able to go and visit him. Now that he is back in the retirement community, he is in quarantine. My mother-in-law is not able to see him or be with him for 14 days. Funerals can't take place. We can't go and hug those who are grieving. Its been sad seeing the volumes of people who are lined up at food banks to get groceries. All of this sadness has put people on a downward trajectory in their spirit. They are now battling depression. Its just so sad. For many people, it is hard to find and experience joy in a time like this.

As we read this passage from Philippians in a time like this it almost feels cold and insensitive. **"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"** We would like to grab hold of the apostle's robe and shake him and scream in his face: **What do you mean rejoice always. Can't you see what we are going through here?!?!???** Right now, JOY is the last thing on our minds. But this isn't an isolated verse. Throughout the Scriptures it is the expectation that God's people will be characterized by Joy. The book of Psalms is filled with invitations to Rejoice. Jesus challenges us to Rejoice, even when we are going through a time of difficulty and persecution. Gordon Fee writes: **"Joy, unmitigated joy, is the distinctive mark of the believer in Christ Jesus."** Joy is a theme in this little book of Philippians. The word joy, or rejoice appears at least 11 times in the 4 chapters of this book. And as we learn the context of this book, it comes as a surprise to us that Joy should be such an important theme in this book. Paul was a missionary and Church planter. He had been responsible for establishing this Church in the city of Philippi. He had moved on and was writing this letter to them to encourage them. He is actually writing the letter from a jail cell. His future is very uncertain. He knew that there was a possibility that he was not getting out of this alive. He could be executed any day. The Philippians had come to love Paul and they were overwhelmed with sadness because their beloved pastor was in prison, facing the possibility of death. Paul writes this letter to his friends to encourage them to find joy, in spite of his circumstances. Paul was able to find joy because the cause of Christ was being advanced through his imprisonment and he encourages the Philippians to rejoice with him.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! In order to understand Paul's challenge to rejoice in dark and difficult circumstances, we need to understand what Joy means as it is used in the Bible. When we think of Joy, we may think of various scenarios. We may think of a Family gathering to celebrate a birthday or some special event. It is likely there would be lots of laughter, and warmth at such a gathering. It would be an experience of Joy. Or we may think about the Joy that we feel when someone tells a joke or story that makes us laugh. But that is not how the Bible understands joy. Gordon Fee helps us: **Christian joy is not the temporal kind, which comes and goes with one's circumstances, rather it is predicated altogether on one's relationship with the Lord and is thus an abiding, deeply spiritual quality of life.** Joy is a feeling that is rooted deep within our spirit. It is not a "happy face", smiling all the time happiness. It is not dependent on one's outward circumstances. But it grows out of our faith in God.

Paul's word in Philippians 4:4 is **Rejoice in the Lord.** The key to experiencing joy is to have a relationship with the God. Joy is not something that we can make up, or create for ourselves. It comes from God Himself. Think of all that God offers us. He is a God of compassion and love for all people. He is a God who forgives iniquity and wrongdoing. He has come to the world in the person

of Jesus. Jesus suffered and died on the cross to take God's anger against our sin, so that we could be made right in His sight. God has given us the gift of His presence, His Holy Spirit. God has promised us the gift of eternal life with Him in heaven. So God offers these wonderful spiritual blessings. And we don't lose those blessings because of the sad events and experiences that we are going through. In addition to the gift of salvation, we are aware of God's hand of blessing on us every day. So, experiencing joy is a result of our choice. We choose to focus our attention on what God has done for us and what God has given to us.

So we have these **conflicting emotions**. On the one hand, we experience joy because of what God has done for us. But on the other hand, we are sad because of all the bad things that we have encountered. How do we hold these two opposing emotions. How do we manage the tension in our spirit from these emotions. I don't want to be trite. Be happy, no matter what. Sometimes that's what we are told when we are sad. We are almost made to feel guilty if we are sad. But that's not fair. We have experienced losses during this time. The pain and sadness are real. I think it is important that we find a way to process and release the pain of sadness and grief that we have experienced so that it will not control us. There is a form of prayer that is used by some of the writers of the Bible that shows us how we can move through those times of darkness, sadness and grief. It is called Lament. Lament is a way of praying where we express the reality of our anger or sadness to the Lord, honestly, in unfiltered language. As they expressed their pain to the Lord, the writers were able to find their way to a place of renewed faith and peace. Let me show you an example. Jeremiah was a prophet to God's people. During Jeremiah's life time, he witnessed the fall of his nation into the hands of their enemies. He watched as fellow citizens were either killed or carried off into exile, forced to resettle and live in a foreign country. He watched as their enemies marched through the land and destroyed homes, sacred places, crops. And Jeremiah was heartbroken. He was sad, grief stricken. He was angry with his people, angry with God. He writes a series of prayers, pouring out his heart to the Lord. Listen to the pain of his soul. **Lamentations 3:13-20**. But as he prays, his spirit begins to move to a place of healing. **Read 3:21-33**.

I believe that God has included these prayers of Lament in the Bible for our benefit, to show us a way of recovering joy. May I suggest to you that you take your pain to the Lord. Find a way to express it to Him – either in your silent prayers, or spoken prayers. Maybe you want to write your prayer out. And as you pour out your heartache to the Lord, invite Him to guide you into His presence and reassure you of His love for you. I believe that He will renew your joy as you do that.

Sometimes Joy is Hard. We are in one of those times. I believe the Lord wants to heal the brokenness of our hearts, to comfort us in our grief, and restore to us an awareness of joy because of all that He has done for us. If you would like to talk more about your feelings of sadness or grief, I would be glad to listen to you and pray with you.

Thank you.

Blessing – May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to You. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.