

# Rejoice

Sermon

July 10, 2016

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Philippians 4:4-9, 12-13

*“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthen me.”*

Please pray with me:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O God our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Well last weekend, we celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July-Independence Day.

Many of us had family picnics, cook outs, and watched some fireworks.

The 4<sup>th</sup> of July marks 240th year anniversary that we declared independence from Great Britain.

One of the famous lines in our Declaration of Independence is:

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”.*

We can get life and liberty, but what was so important about the pursuit of happiness that the authors felt compelled to put it in?

And did the word happiness back then mean the same as it does today?

Here’s what I found.

The term happiness comes from the Old Norse term for “happ” meaning luck or chance.

It is also related to the Old English word “haepic” meaning equal.

US Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy says that perhaps the definition of happiness for the writers of the Declaration of Independence, was about an individual's contribution to society - like civic responsibility - rather than pursuits of self- gratification.

Today, I want to focus a little bit more around the "pursuit of happiness.

What does it mean to be happy? To be joyful? To rejoice?

This is the second week of our sermon series, "My Life Verse."

Last week you heard from our Senior Pastor, Dr. Gardner.

Today, I am here to share mine.

Mine is more of a life chapter or life book.

I love the book of Philippians and in particular chapter 4.

Last summer, I preached on Philippians 4:13, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Philippians is a book in the New Testament written by the Apostle Paul.

Before Paul became an Apostle, he was one of the first people that had persecuted Christians.

Then Paul had a conversion and he became one the best evangelists.

He went around Greece, Macedonia as well as other places and established churches in cities.

One of those churches was in the city of Philippi.

Paul wrote letters to these churches to encourage them and help them spiritually grow in their faith communities.

These letters are a big portion of our New Testament.

Paul wrote Philippians while he was in prison.

This letter is a letter of encouragement and hope from a man that is in prison and possibly facing death.

In chapter 4:4 he says, *"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, Rejoice."*

Paul doesn't say try to be happy or once I am released from prison, I will be happy.

Instead, he says to, "Rejoice in the Lord Always!"

To Rejoice means – to be glad/to take delight

To live a joy filled life.

To rejoice is a choice/a conscious decision that we get to make every day.  
It is a discipline that can be put into practice and over time it can be learned.

I am still trying to achieve this in my daily life.

I have read many books on spiritual disciplines and the one I really like is

The Celebration of Discipline, by Richard Foster.

He dedicates a whole chapter on the discipline of being joyful.

*He says, "If we fill our lives with simple good things and constantly thank God for them, we will be joyful, that is, full of joy. And what about our problems? When we determine to dwell on the good and excellent things in life, we will be so full of those things that they will tend to swallow our problems. The decision to set the mind on higher things in life is an act of the will. It is not something that falls on our heads. It is the result of consciously chosen way of thinking and living."*

Life can be hard.

There are difficult moments, but how we look at life can make all the difference in the world.

Walter and Gracie had just gotten married and were on their honeymoon in a cabin in the woods.

They were having a wonderful time until a pesky wood pecker showed up.

This wood pecker kept making noise outside of their cabin at the break of dawn and waking them up each morning while they were there.

The last night of their stay was the worst.

A heavy rain started and they soon learned that the wood pecker had put holes in their cabin's roof.

They got soaked, stuff in the cabin got soaked.

They packed up their car and left.

At first they were both angry and upset, but they soon realized that they did not want anything to interfere with their honeymoon.

So, they tried to think of something positive about the whole experience.

Then Gracie came up with a wonderful idea to make the wood pecker into a cartoon.

Walter was an illustrator and soon got to work after they returned home.

He created the famous cartoon, Woody the Woodpecker.

**It is our perception that shapes our reality.**

**It is not necessary to change our situation – like our job, or house – to find joy.**

**It is about changing our mindset.**

**Just like the Apostle Paul.**

**He was in prison for preaching about Christ.**

**Prison is not a place that you want to be in.**

**Paul was most likely in chains and facing execution.**

**He could have chosen to be angry, or bitter, but he chose to be joyful.**

**To rejoice in the Lord always and to think about things that are worthy of praise instead of negative things.**

**The news this week has been very overwhelming, disturbing and upsetting.**

**The shooting of Alton Sterling, then the shooting of Philando Castile, and then the sniper in Dallas that wounded 9 people and killed 5 police officers.**

**Then last month, we had the shooting in Orlando killing 49 victims.**

**All of this makes us fearful and angry.**

**There are a lot of horrible things going on in the world - Things we have no control over and we don't know what we can do.**

**But while we are trying to come up with solutions and figure out ways we can help – the one thing we can do is have control over our attitude.**

**I was watching the news Friday morning after the Dallas shootings.**

**They interviewed a woman that had been at the Black Lives Matter Rally when the shooting occurred.**

***Her response was this, "You have to keep love in your heart. You have to keep moving forward for peace and justice. You can't let hatred or bitterness get the best of you."***

**You see, "Rejoice in the Lord" doesn't mean we live with our heads in the sand. It means we are very aware of what is happening in our world, but we know that we have a God that is more powerful than hate.**

**We have to keep love in our hearts.**

**We can't let our anger or fear or bitterness get to us.**

**We have to be better than that.**

**It is so easy to think negative about the world or even about our daily life, but with enough practice, we can take a bad situation and make it into a positive one – even in our ordinary lives.**

**Take me mother in-law, Shirley for instance.**

**Shirley always looks for the positives in life.**

**Rarely, have I seen her angry or in a negative mood.**

**A couple of years ago, Shirley and I were in the car together driving to see family.**

**I was driving at the time and we ran into construction.**

**There were orange cones everywhere, the traffic was really backed up and constructions workers were busy at work.**

**I was quiet, but irritated at the situation.**

**I mean we had places to go and things to see.**

**I didn't have time to waste in the car.**

**How dare they ruin my day.**

**Then I heard Shirley say out loud, "This road is going to look so good after they get done with it. Isn't it so nice of them to fix the road for us?"**

**And then I thought, "You know, she's right.**

**I can let this upset me or I can choose to find something good out of it."**

**I heard a quote once that says, "A negative mind will never give you a positive life."**

**You have to truly look for joy. To search it out.**

**It is always there, but we may not be aware of it or in the right mindset for it.**

**Sometimes, it's the simple joys in life – like a sunset, or children laughing, or birds chirping.**

**There is joy out there.**

**You just have to be open to it.**

**Sometimes, you can even create some joy.**

**There was a video that went viral a few months ago that my daughter showed me.**

It is a video of a Mom that bought a Chewbacca mask (from Star Wars) and decided to film herself trying it on for the first time.

Take a look -----

This video goes on for another 3-4 minutes.

If you get a chance, watch it.

All you have to do is Google – Chewbacca Mom.

Her laughter is contagious and the video will definitely make you laugh.

This Mom (Candace) went to return some yoga pants that didn't fit.

As she was getting ready to leave the store, she bumped into a box and heard the sound of Chewbacca coming from the box.

She picked up the box and saw the mask and she knew that she just had to get it.

Chewie is one of her favorite characters from Star Wars – and as you can see from the video – she was so excited about putting it on.

She couldn't even wait to get home.

The mask brought her so much joy.

Her intention was to video tape herself trying it on for the first time and to send it to a few of her friends.

But, her friends loved it so much that they sent it to their friends and before she knew it her video went viral.

She ended up on talk shows like Good Morning America and Ellen.

She was given a trip for her family to go to Disney World and to spend time with Chewbacca.

When asked why she thought it went viral, Candace says,

*“In all honestly, I think the world as a whole is in need of a good laugh. I think we're in need of somebody to lift our spirits, to not take ourselves so seriously, and to maybe break some cynicism worldwide. We all need to have a good belly laugh with somebody, and it happened to be me that day.”*

Then she was asked, *“What was the best part of all of this? Was it being on various TV shows or going to Disney World with your family?”*

Candace says,

***“The best part of all of this is being able to share joy with people, hear stories of people coming out of depression. I had one lady message me and tell me she has an autistic daughter that hadn’t laughed in two months, and she said every time she showed her the video, she laughed and laughed. And from one mama’s heart to another mama, to see a child laugh that you haven’t seen laugh, those are the stories I will take with me every day.”***

**Candace ends her video by saying, “It’s the simple joys.”**

**It’s the simple joys.**

**Candace shows us through this video and through her experience afterwards that when you’re joyful, it can spread to others.**

**It also shows us that helping others can bring us joy.**

**When you have purpose in life that gives your life meaning.**

**Meaning can help bring you joy.**

**No matter what is going on in the world or in our daily life - The one thing we can do each and every day is to choose our own attitude.**

**No one gets to choose it for us.**

**Here is what I want for you...**

**To lead a joy filled life.**

**To find joy in everyday life.**

**To know that you are loved.**

**When our kids were little we had a bedtime routine.**

**Part of it was to read a bedtime stories, ask what was their favorite thing of the day and then say a bedtime prayer.**

**Then, every night before we left their room, we would always remind them of all the people that loved them.**

**We would say - Jesus loves you, Mommy loves you, Daddy loves you, Grandma loves you, Grandpa loves you...we would continue on until we named all the people in our family including the pets.**

**We wanted them to know that no matter what happened during the day, they were loved and things would be okay.**

**So, even in those days of skinned knees and fights with best friends, they would think of the positive things before going off to sleep.**

**So, tonight when you are getting ready for bed – when you are putting on your jammies, brushing your teeth, setting your alarm clock, turning out the lights and saying a prayer – I want you to know that you are loved.**

**I want you to think about all the people that love you. God loves you, your family loves you...**

**Remember that you are part of a community – part of the Old Mission family who cares about each other deeply.**

**Things may be happening in the world that you can't control, but know that you are an individual with incredible worth and you are loved – and as Christians we are to love others – to keep love in our hearts.**

**That is our calling.**

**There is good in the world and you are a part of it.**

**When you are loving others, you are a part of the good.**

**May you pursue happiness, but may you find joy.**

**Amen.**