

Sermon: Rejoice? Rejoice! Text: Philippians 4:4-9 Thanksgiving Sunday, October 7 2018  
Rideau Park United Church, Ottawa ON Rev. Steve Clifton

The Apostle Paul writes: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice.... whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.* Philippians 4

Yeah Paul. Sure

Rejoice always. Right

Rejoice sometimes. OK.

Rejoice Always? Paul you may be an apostle but you are over reaching.

There are things I feel like rejoicing about...

Lots of things make it hard to rejoice.

We live in the world of Trump. Bluster, Threat. Dog Whistle. Division. Fake News. Falsehood. Canada is no longer seen as friend and ally. Some of the political toxicity to the south threatens to spill over the border. Where is the rejoicing in that?

Climate change leads to extreme weather events, imperils future generations. Tornadoes and typhoons and tsunamis. Rejoice?

Women's voices. Not heard. Or if heard -Ignored. Mocked from places of power. No rejoicing there.

The start of another hockey season. If you are a Leaf fan you are already planning the Stanley Cup parade route. Go ahead and rejoice. If you are Senators fan? Erik Karlsson, a generational talent, team captain and fan favorite has been given away to another team. Rejoice? Not so much.

If you watch the news of late there isn't a lot there to inspire rejoicing. The media, does not draw our attention to good things. Rejoice in the Lord always? Yeah right.

And maybe there are things in your life and your world which are a barrier to rejoicing. On this Thanksgiving, how do you respond to these words of Paul? *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice* Do you feel like rejoicing? Are you thinking about the good things in your life? Or is there something else on your mind... or in the back of your mind...?

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Paul writes: *Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.*

Does it help to remember that Paul wrote these upbeat words from a prison cell, with his future uncertain?

Paul had not lived the most secure and peaceful life. He had been shipwrecked, attacked by angry mobs. He lived an itinerant life, moving from place to place over many years. Often in his work he would establish a church, leave it in the hands of local leaders and then move on to another town, only to hear, in time, that the church he founded was quarrelling or divided or had been led astray. Now on death row for the “crime” of bringing a Gentile deep into the Jerusalem temple, which led to a riot, in spite of everything, Paul is able to write: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice....whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

In the midst of negative messages and stressed voices how do we like Paul think about the good, the lovely and the admirable? On this Thanksgiving weekend how do we remind ourselves of all that we have been given as blessing? Maybe it’s a matter of where we look and who we listen to...

Some years ago, Bill McKibben, an American environmentalist and writer wrote a book called *The Age of missing Information*. To prepare for writing his book he did two things. One fall day, with the help of friends he recorded all the television broadcast on the cable TV system in the city of Fairfax Virginia ; then he took the time to watch all 24 hours of broadcasting on all of the 90 channels that were recorded.

After immersing himself in the media and finding himself feeling weighed down by it all he did something completely different. He went away from all media sources, away from TV, radio, internet and print media and spent some days watching the world pass by in the Adirondack Mountains of New England.

The resulting book focuses on perception. Watching television gave the writer one view of the world: impersonal; commercial; devoid of real human contact. Living in Creation gave him the perception that our ancestors had for many centuries; the world became local, personal, intimate and alive.

We feel connected to the world God has placed us in when we focus on sky and cloud, light and shadow, sun and rain, birds and animals...and on the people that surround us in this life...And it’s good. And we are moved to rejoice.

On my sabbatical this summer we made three forays into Trumps America. We crossed the border with trepidation

In June we went to Cape Cod, to the ocean, sat on beaches and watched whales and seals swimming by.

In August we went to the Acadia National Park in Maine. Sea and sky. Rock and forest.

Later we went to stay with the Brothers of the Benedictine Priory in Weston VT. Beautiful liturgy, warm hospitality, green mountains, wild flowers blooming.

We were in Trumps America, but where we saw warmth and hospitality, beauty and life.

Maybe learning to rejoice and to be thankful is matter of paying attention in a different way and of being mindful of the gifts that are around us.

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Rejoice always? In the Ignatian spiritual tradition, the great spiritual teacher Ignatius of Loyola encourages Jesus followers to look for God in times of consolation and desolation. Consolation – moments that hold joy, peace, assurance. Desolation – times when we feel bereft, isolated, empty or dark. Ignatius encourages us to look deeply into both light and darkness, to seek God in the easy and the difficult. Sometimes we might be find God in hard times and challenging circumstances and find ourselves rejoicing in an unexpected place or moment.

Not long ago Ottawa Gatineau was hit by tornados and downbursts that levelled trees, damaged homes and cut power for a a few hours, or for a day or two or more...And people, reflecting on the tornado, speak of loss and stress and worry, but people also speak of gift and grace found in the literal darkness of the storm`s aftermath. The aftermath of the storm made us appreciate things we take for granted like light and heat.

And the storm reminded us of what is really important, of what can be repaired or replaced and of what cannot be restored.

The storm`s havoc created community, drew neighbors together. In the desolation of wind and storm was there not a glimpse grace? Was there not God?

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice*

Ok Paul maybe.

For all the good things we are given may we give thanks to God. May we rejoice in the goodness and grace of our Creator.