



St. Michael's Church

CHARLESTON, SC

SUNDAY, JUNE 10, 2018

- 1 Peter 1:1-9
- John 15:9-12
- Galatians 5:22-23
- Nehemiah 8:9-10
- Deuteronomy 28:47-48

PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

HELP US LORD TO BE SO CONNECTED TO YOU THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE SERVANTS OF OTHERS.

TAKE OUR LIPS AND SPEAK THROUGH THEM,
OUR MINDS AND THINK THROUGH THEM,
AND TAKE OUR HEARTS, AND SET THEM ON FIRE.

Tomorrow is a critical day for the life of St. Michael's Church. A day that could very well determine the future of generations to come. A day that could very well shape families, old and young together. For it is tomorrow that Vacation Bible School begins! VBS where so many lives have been changed over the years! Some of you may have thought I was referring to the US Supreme Court decision and whether we hear if our case is going to be heard or not. My friends, on such a day as this, where we wait, and where the stakes so high, I want to speak to you about unconditional joy, or joy with no strings. **Joy** defined is delight and is mentioned 145 times in Scripture! Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit! Yet there are two kinds of joy: Courageous Joy and Circumstantial Joy.

Circumstantial joy depends upon right circumstances and outcomes to be joyful. Circumstantial joy says I'll be joyful if I have a new house or spouse, or if I'm healed. For many teens, it is I'll be happy if I get the car, college and job. Circumstantial joy is always fleeting, fickle, frustrating, and temporary.

But courageous Joy, that's something different. It is constant and not dependent on our circumstances. Enter Peter's first letter, where he describes a scattered people full of joy even through suffering. Why the suffering? On July 19, 64 AD, the great fire of Rome breaks out. The fire burns for three days and nights, is brought under

control and then breaks out again with double the ferocity. It causes widespread devastation, and takes another six days to control. Interestingly, many blamed Emperor Nero for initiating the fire. Nero, looking for scapegoats to avoid the anger of his people, blames Christians. This brings savage violence against the followers of Jesus. Nero would roll Christians in tar and burn them, as well as other forms of torture just too gruesome to share from the pulpit. Bottom line, Christians would be burned every night in Nero's gardens, and it looked as if the devil were about to devour the Christian church. At the same time, many pagans in Rome were angry with the Christians because the Christians would not join them in idolatry, drinking, and debauchery. Therefore the pagans began calling the Christians "haters of the human race." The Christians of Peter's day simply would not go along with culture and they suffered for it. In return, their rights, property, possessions, and their future would be taken. This is why they have to leave their home and scatter all over Asia minor, and it's why Peter writes the letter we just read. To bring hope and strength by observing the ONE THING WHAT WAS NOT TAKEN from them. THEIR JOY.

Peter writes, "Though you do not now see Jesus, you love and believe in Him and rejoice with A joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory!" When all their earthly hopes were taken, how on earth did these early Christians keep their joy? We know their joy wasn't circumstantial, it wasn't in buildings, denominations or programs. What kept them joy-filled? This morning I want to give you three anchors to their courageous joy.

The first is this. They knew that Courageous Joy depended on the unique Joy Jesus gives. Verse 3: "by His mercy, we are given new life through the resurrection." Their joy, and our joy, is chiefly rooted in what Jesus has done for us. By His mercy, we are given new life through the resurrection! What is mercy? Well, if Grace is getting the good things you don't deserve, then Mercy is not getting the bad we do deserve! COURAGEOUS joy is based on the Mercies of Jesus, his dying for us that we would be spared, forgiven, and set free! His mercy, meaning we can be forgiven for all we have done wrong, words, actions, inactions, and things thought but never said. God has forgiven! Wiped clean! All those sins have been paid for, and further, God delights in you, God sings over you!!! This is THE FIRST ROOT OF courageous joy.

Secondly, the Joy which Jesus gives comes from the fact that for the believer, we have been given eternal life. Verse 4: "we are given an inheritance that never spoils." Rooted in Christ, we are given an astonishing promise, though we will all experience our final breath at some point, the Christian will never die! We live forever under the throne-ship of God! Now, I have worked with families before where a son or daughter thought they were given a sizeable inheritance in a will, only to have an argument in the family, and boom, out of the will. That can never happen for the believer! We are given an inheritance that never spoils!

So, First, Joy is found chiefly in Jesus and what He has done for us. Secondly, Joy is found in the promise of salvation!

But third, suffering is an anchor of courageous joy because it leads us to the realization that Jesus is all we have. Verse 6: “ In all this you rejoice though for a little while you will experience suffering.” What I love about the Bible is that it never just smooths things over, it faces our biggest challenges head on. Joy and Pain are not mutually exclusive for the Christian. We know suffering is part of what it means to be Christian, all we have to do is recount the suffering of Jesus on the cross. If we our joy is circumstantial, our sufferings will wipe us away like a tsunami. Suffering reveals Jesus is all we have. Peter is also clear that suffering is always, always, always temporary. And in fact, while Jesus doesn’t cause every hurt or cancer, He will always use our suffering to shape us.

Remember the name Satan means thief, and the name Jesus means rescuer. Which means, it is Satan’s Goal to rob you of your joy. It also means that because of what Jesus has done for us, when we call upon Him, our joy is restored. Think about it. Can death take your joy? No, because Jesus is greater than death. Can failure take your joy? No, because Jesus is greater than your sin. Can betrayal take your joy? No, because Jesus will never leave you. Can sickness take your joy? No, because God has promised– whether on this side of the grave or the other–to heal you. Can disappointment take your joy? No, because though your plan may not work out, you know God’s plan will. Jesus in John 16 says, “Now is your time of suffering, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, for no one can take away your joy!”

What about you? What has been taken from you? Your health? Your house? Have you buried a dream? Have you buried a marriage? Buried a friend? As you look at the burial plots of life, is your joy buried there, too? If so, you may have substituted courageous joy for Circumstantial joy. Which is why Jesus says what he says in John 15. Abide in me. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments and abide in my love, my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete. My friends, Courageous joy comes from abiding in Jesus. Our three anchors:

- Remembering what He has done for us
- Remembering our eternal Salvation is from Him
- Knowing that Jesus often uses suffering to remind us He is all we have

Let’s go deeper. Here are four guard rails to keep us on the highway of joy.

First, Moses, when speaking to the Jews in the exodus writes, “Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy, you will wear a yoke of burden.” Which tells us that joy is a commandment. We are commanded to live this joy.

Which means second, that Joy is a discipline. It requires discipline to remember to find our joy in what Jesus has done for us, that we do have eternal salvation!

Which means third, Joy is a choice. Not an emotion or a feeling. We have to choose it, a daily decision!

And finally, blessed Nehemiah Chapter 8 reminds us that the Joy of the Lord is our strength. Notice Nehemiah doesn't say the joy of our Circumstance is our strength, or the joy of our job is our strength. No, it's the Joy of the Lord that is our source of strength. Joy is not a luxury!

So, four guard rails of Joy:

1. It is commanded
2. It is a discipline
3. It is a daily choice
4. It is our strength!

Okay, let's put feet on this message as we apply this to your tomorrow life. There is one place where courageous joy needs to manifest itself: your face! We are responsible for our faces! As Christians today, everything we do, right on down to our faces, teaches others about our joy and trust in Jesus. If our faces dictate anxiety and apprehension, we will never win the world! Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., was a member of the U.S. Supreme Court for 30 years. He's been called "the greatest justice since John Marshall." At one point in his life, Justice Holmes explained his choice of a career by saying: "I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers." Our inside Joy must be matched with an unconditional outside joy! Yes there are times we all need spiritual face-lifts. Make no mistake, for the courageous Joy-filled Christian, our facial expression is a discipline, and is rooted in Jesus.

Okay, assess with me your joy level. Are you joyless? Or maybe just a bit blah? Do you spread more pessimism than hope? If so, God can help you. Grimness is not a Christian virtue. Perhaps like me, from time to time you get what I call the 3am attacks on joy. Satan the joy thief commonly works the 3am shift. If you have lost your joy, or are just in the blahs, I want to submit two ways through the Holy Spirit to get it back. First, marinate your mind in what Jesus has done for you:

- That we are forgiven
- That this world is not all there is,
- He is all we have in our sufferings

Just rest in that! If you don't know that eternal promise, today is your day to say Jesus I give you my heart, and my life! In fact, if you have never repented begin today! Today is the day to say, re-awaken my spirit Lord! Inject in my heart and mind this courageous unconditional joy!

But secondly, our highest joy comes when we give the joy we've been given away! Recall the words of James, who writes, " Don't just be hearers of the word, but be doers." When your anxieties reach a fevered pitch, relentlessly and in a loop stealing your joy, remember Jesus said Abide in me, keep my commandments. His greatest Commandment, Love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor as yourself. Giving away joy to your neighbor! [CS Lewis reminds us that our highest joy comes when we forget ourselves.](#) If you're wondering where I will be at 9am tomorrow, I won't be on basing my joy on a Circumstantial decision of a court case. I will be at Park Circle with my sleeves rolled up in all things Vacation Bible School, Join me out there! The most joy filled folks are those who are living out their HOLY SPIRIT GIVEN gifts for ministry!

Let me end with the conversion story of that French 17th Century Philosopher Blaise Pascal. On Monday, November 23, 1654, Pascal would have a vision that would convert his heart and mind to Christianity. He actually wrote down the words and phrases of the vision. This is what he writes:

- From about half past ten at night to about half an hour after midnight, FIRE.
- The God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of philosophers and scholars.
- Certitude, heartfelt joy, peace.
- God of Jesus Christ.
- "My God." . . .
- Joy, Joy, Joy, tears of joy. . .
- This is eternal life that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent
- Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ.
- May I not fall from Him
- I will not forget your word!

For the rest of his life, Pascal carried these words around on a piece of parchment. In fact he had them literally sewn into the inside breast pocket of his coat, so the

words would physically be next to his heart. Tomorrow, regardless of what happens, we will be courageous and joy filled people taking delight in Jesus, because He is in control. Let us pray.