

Sermon 10 June 2018 Joy

Philippians 4:4-7 John 15:9-12

In our gospel reading Jesus says to his disciples that, 'I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow.' And just what is he telling them? Basically, to live a life of love. So the message here is that when we receive love, we feel joy, and that is probably self-explanatory, but also that it is the giving of love that we also feel joy. Now that is probably not quite so self-explanatory.

One of the great things about the giving of love is that it is a two-way exercise – both the receiver and the giver benefit, they both feel good. You want to feel good about life, about yourself, well then go and give some love. I will never forget the comment a student at King's made to me when she returned from her first stint of community service. From memory, I think she had been visiting a retirement home. I happened to be there when she and the other students got out of the taxi. With a big smile on her face, she said to me, 'Rev, that was one of the most uplifting things I have ever done.' I don't want to say any more on this because next week I will be talking about servanthood.

The thing with joy is that it is actually about attitude. How you respond to any situation is up to you. You can look for the downside or you can look for the upside, and how you respond will determine how you feel. Just a couple of weeks ago I experienced a quite simple illustration of that. Mervis was working so I was on duty dressing and feeding the kids and getting them off to school. There was naturally a little pressure time-wise but we were doing ok. I had Yohan half-dressed and he took off, laughing. My first reaction was to get annoyed with him and call out to him 'to get back here asap!' I am always in a hurry. But then I thought, 'He just wants to have fun and he wants me to chase him.' So that's what I did. He squealed with delight, did a circuit and came back to be dressed. And I thought, 'That wasn't so bad, we only lost 30 seconds but we both had fun and we are both far better for it, far better than if I had got grumpy with him which in turn would have made him unhappy.' It is all too easy to take the negative option, and I will come back to that shortly. In our reading from Philippians Paul tells us 'to always be full of joy in the Lord,' and he emphasizes this by repeating it, 'I say it again – rejoice!' This is a command, not an option. I find it interesting that he feels the need to not just say this, but to make a strong point about it. And I think this is because too many Christians do focus on the negative – don't do this, don't do it that way. Worship becomes a serious business – no place for frivolity, or having fun.

Dr Tony Campolo, American pastor, author and lecturer, tells a wonderful story about an occasion when he was speaking at a Christian festival in Pennsylvania. The festival drew tens of thousands of young people and had a definite Pentecostal flavour to it. The festival reached a crescendo on the Saturday night and word got around that he would be preaching at a nearby Lutheran church the next morning.

Hundreds of charged-up young people from the festival came to the Sunday service. Instead of the usual four to five hundred people, there were well over a thousand packed into the auditorium and the balcony. This was a very 'high' church, bells and smells and a lot of ritual.

The presiding minister took his place behind the pulpit and intoned in a sombre fashion, 'This is the day the Lord has made. Let us be glad in it! Let us enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise!'

At that point, one of the young people in the balcony yelled out, 'All right!' The rest of the young people started to clap and cheer. Tony Campolo said the reaction of the presiding minister was quite something to watch. The poor man just didn't know how to handle it. His knees actually buckled. The last thing in the world he expected when he called upon the congregation to 'make a joyful noise unto the Lord' was that anyone actually would.

I think we have to be careful that we don't allow ritual and formality get in the way of joy and spontaneous worship. It is important that we strike the right balance, and above all, 'to be always full of the joy in the Lord', as Paul puts it.

I want to finish by saying this. The way we really influence people, make any sort of impact on others

is by what we do and by what we are, not by what we say. If we are to be any sort of an advertisement for our faith, it is our actions not our words that will determine the nature and the message of that advertisement. Spreading goodwill is as good a way of promoting our faith as anything else. And what is a very simple way of spreading goodwill? Smiling! Nothing lifts spirits quite like a genuine and happy smile. 'Smiling faces make us feel happy'. *Proverbs 15:30*. Show happiness and if you do it enough, people will want some of what you have got.

Unfortunately, we all know people who, no matter what the situation, will always look for the downside, the negative. There's the story of the farmer who had a neighbour, a constant complainer and someone who simply could not see the positive side of anything. The farmer decided to impress the man for once in his existence, so he bought this fantastic hunting dog. He trained it thoroughly and invited his joyless friend to accompany him duck hunting. He showed the neighbour how the dog could stand motionless for an hour and pick up a scent a kilometer away. Not impressed. The farmer shot a duck which landed in the middle of the pond. Upon command, the dog trotted out, walked on the surface of the water, retrieved the bird and dropped it at the feet of his master.

'What do you think of that?' the farmer asked his neighbour. The neighbour looked at him and said, 'Your dog can't swim, can he?'

There's just no pleasing some people. Joy is an attitude. Joy is infectious. Faith should lead to a positive attitude to life. Love is a positive sentiment and a positive force. There is absolutely nothing negative about love, and love lies at the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

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