

April 26, 2015 “Determined to Rejoice” Philippians 4:4-9

This portion from Paul's letter to the church at Phillipi has become of renewed importance in my own life. I have told you from time to time that I have faced a lifelong battle with depression. To put it in every day language there are always things that happen to us, circumstances that arise that cause us to see the glass as half empty. It is a truism that if the glass is half empty, the glass is half full! The Christian faith invites us and challenges us to to be positive, to exercise the muscle of our faith and to see things in a brighter light.

The apostle Paul had a measure of authority that simply arose out of his faithfulness in writing this letter. Philippians, Colossians, Phelemon and Ephesians, were all written from the city of Rome. Paul at the time was looking at the world not through rose coloured glasses but through the equivalent of iron bars. He was in prison. He was in prison for being a Christian. He was in jail because he celebrated his faith and shared his faith. Which is another way of saying he had reason to be down, to see the glass as half empty, to be depressed.

Where has being faithful to God gotten him? It has led him to the conviction that Jesus is indeed the Christ and a further conviction to tell the Jewish world that very truth. Jesus is the Messiah. That turned Paul's persescution of the church on its head. He goes from being the persecutor to being the persecuted. His zeal as a Jew, become zeal as a Christian he is now public enemy number one among his own people. To make it worse, Paul became committed to the truth that this good news was meant not only for the Jews but for the rest of the human family...the Gentiles. He becomes public enemy number one to the Jews, and the Romans,

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and his ministry at one point was questioned by the infant church. There is a pile of rejection there! From the inside of a jail cell it would seem Paul had reason to be a little down, grey around the edges, depressed.

These are the circumstances in which he pens these marvelous

words: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice!” In fact the lesson I have tried to glean from the committed apostle is simply this....Believing in Jesus, having become one of the forgiven, Paul is determined to witness to the truth of His faith by rejoicing in every circumstance in which he finds himself. Personally this is powerful stuff. I see it in the faithfulness of Peter. I see it in the faithfulness of the Philippians in their sending Paul the support of their message to him, the messenger who bore the message, and the practical financial support he needed at this time. It is indeed as though, joy ran rampant through the early church...and it should run rampant among us for the same fundamental reasons.

The great cry of “Rejoice” with which this portion begins is a counter culture command. If you watch the evening news, or read the newspapers, there are a lot of reasons to be soberly concerned. So many people are in difficult circumstances. Most of us are in the age group where people we have done major parts of our lives with are dying. Reason to be soberly concerned! I believe it was Tuesday a man who helped us build the church in Pickering passed away. His health in retirement had been good. A sudden heart attack. Paul says... “Rejoice”. And the thing is Paul means it. Rejoice! And again I say rejoice! Says it twice.

You know I am tempted to want to reply to Paul, but I am in mourning here. A friend has died and died suddenly. I can hear

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Paul's reply. “Was he a brother in Christ?” Well...yes he was Paul. And he was kind to others. He was one of those guys who would find ways to create fellowship opportunities that the church did not create. He would have half a dozen men over to his house for lunch, and to join him afterwards in a game of pool on the table in his basement. I can hear Paul's reply... “I told you to rejoice!” But we have lost him, Paul, we are sad. “Rejoice,” he says. And you know he is right. The memories I have of that man are all of that kind. He was a servant to others. Rejoice for what he did. And my very human mind wants to reply...but.... And you know I do not have a reason not to rejoice. He was a member of the Board. We

did not always agree on everything. But we had this in common. All he wanted to do was see the church go forward and to see it growing. Rejoice....but where else did I see him? Always in worship. Rejoice. Where is he now? With the Lord. Rejoice.

You know simply because the fact is I hate to lose an argument, I hear my mind ticking over, you can't be serious that we should "always rejoice?" Paul is adamant. "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice!" And I have to admit I see what he is getting at. He is really saying and really meaning to say...if you are going to follow the Lord it is time to be determined to rejoice. If Jesus Christ is the Lord, Lord of all and Lord of everything, rejoice. Be determined. It is about seeing the glass as half full, as opposed to seeing it as half empty. For me it is the most powerful antidote to what I call depression.

I am aware that there are some who suffer from depression as the result of a chemical imbalance. That takes medicine prescribed by a doctor to restore the balance or at least bring it back closer to balance. That is not what happens to me. I get

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moody because I focus on what I perceive to be wrong. I get moody because I perceive I have lost control of my life, or my current circumstances. The author of the letter to the Philippians is rather saying shift your view point. Remember this, "The Lord is near." You are not alone. He is close by. No matter what your circumstances appear to be the overarching fact is this. The Lord is near. Real and near. Which means in my case, I am in danger of not seeing the whole picture, of distorting what I think I see. Of focussing on the bit of grey and missing the fact, the undeniable fact, that the sun is still shining.

I really want to argue with Paul. You know there are times, days, when I just don't seem to have the strength to be so positive. So happy. The problem is Paul is not talking about simply wearing a smile. He is talking about working at what we believe and using the great truth of salvation, of forgiveness of sin, of eternal security based on the facts that God is good and has our salvation at the top of His agenda to call us to be

determined to be a rejoicing people. This is about being positive as opposed to being negative.

He goes on to say something that would surely seem to be nonsense to people who do not believe in Jesus, and Him crucified, and risen the 3rd day. He says, "Do not be anxious about anything." Again, there is a temptation in my experience to want to say, hold on a minute Paul, do you not recognize the size or the extent of my problems? And he is unrelenting. Do not be anxious about anything. Anything with a capital A. "In everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Do you hear what the apostle is saying?

Don't be anxious about anything. Anxiety takes a lot of

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energy. It saps energy. Anxiety can flatten your batteries faster than anything else. Not long ago Barbara got a new I Phone. One thing always leads to another. I had one of those ancient flip phones. Charge it up and it would run for a week. Like me in its senior years my cell phone was down to lasting about 4 days. Just long enough for me to lose track of when I should have charged it and therefore it would eventually have no energy and it was a useless piece of technology. Well when Barbara got a new I Phone, I inherited her old I Phone. It does 50 things my old cell phone could not do. But....it is a dependant little instrument. It uses energy all the time. It needs to be charged every night...regularly...without fail.

Here is Paul's point. And I get it. Don't be anxious about anything. In everything, all circumstances,.. plug yourself in to God...by prayer, and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Talk to Him. Why? Cause He is God and in moments of clarity...you know that and I know that. Talk to Him. Hook up to the Lord and get a charge. Regularly. Daily. As often as you have need. The problem is I tend to try and bear my burdens. As a believer I should know better. There are moments when I do. And the truth is there are moments and they tend to multiply untended, into hours when I do not remember the Lord HE is God. Anxiety is a poor substitute. And it never helps in the long run.

Paul's admonition to us all is that we be positive in every circumstance. To say it another way...to behave like a believer in all kinds of conditions. Further I know Paul is right. I also know that when I am down, I tend to resist that which I know to be true. I simply wanted to share with you something of my walk, and to encourage you, like me and with me, to be determined to rejoice in the Lord always. And again I say rejoice.

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Let us pray.....

Dear Lord Jesus. It's me. I know you know who. You always know. And you always care. And you always love me, even when I do not. Lord help me remember, you died that I might live, no matter what appears to be happening. Thank you Lord for your word and the encouragement of your Spirit. For your people who share the work and therefore the burdens that are part of the work. Hug Don for me. Tell him, tell him I am determined to rejoice. Amen