

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Sermon: "The Fruit of the Spirit: JOY"

Scripture: Galatians 5:16-23, 1 Peter 1:3-9

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Opening Hymn: My hope is built on nothing less

Choruses: This Amazing Grace, Holy Spirit

Song after sermon: Blessed Assurance 687

Let's try a little experiment.

I will read out a statement.

Then you will consider what your response

might be to each situation: happiness, joy, or both?

You just discovered you're getting money back on your tax return.

More than you expected.

Happiness, joy, or both?

Money is tight, but you are confident God will provide.

Happiness, joy, or both?

Your doctor tells you that the tumour is benign.

Happiness, joy, or both?

Your doctor tells you it is cancer,

But he presents a solid plan

and you know you are not alone.

Happiness, joy, or both?

Your son/grandson is accepted

into their desired program of study.

Happiness, joy, or both?

Your son/grandson is taking a gap year

because he has no plan for the future.

You know he was raised well,

and you trust God is at work in his life.

Happiness, joy, or both?

What did you notice?

Some of these situations make us happy.

And some of these situations evoke joy

A feeling of gratitude or contentment

that isn't dependent on life going the way we hoped.

Happiness tends to be momentary and circumstantial.

Joy runs deeper.

Joy is often present in difficult situations

And related to an awareness of God's presence in our lives.

This doesn't mean that happiness is bad,

or that Christians should never be unhappy.

Jesus himself wept.

The difference is that Christian joy can coexist with sorrow.

Today we are continuing in our exploration of the fruit of the Spirit.

Last week we looked at love in Galatians 5.

Today we continue with another fruit of the Spirit: JOY.

And to help us understand this joy,

we're going to turn to 1 Peter—

a letter written to Christians living in difficult circumstances.

Paul tells us that joy is something the Holy Spirit produces in us.

Peter shows that we can experience JOY

when life gets hard.

First Peter was likely written 10-15 years after Paul's letter when Nero's persecution of Christians was intensifying.

Early Christians were often treated with hostility.

They were called atheists (because they rejected the gods),

cannibals (because they practised holy communion),

and incestuous (because they talked about loving their brothers

and sisters) [CBSB 2177, 2178]

In this context of rejection by the surrounding culture,
The Apostle Peter writes a letter meant to encourage
These followers of Jesus.

Peter begins with what was essentially
a Jewish prayer of blessing—a berakah.
It is a prayer that starts by blessing God
and then remembers all the good things God has done.

[see Thomas Mortiz "1 Peter 1:3-9" The Lectionary Commentary: Acts & the Epistles 543,544]

Peter's begins by remembering
what God has done and what God has promised.
God has given us new life,
and God has given us a secure future.
And that is his reason for JOY.
Let's explore this a little more closely.

Peter notes that God has
“given us new birth into a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ
from the dead” [1 Peter 1:3]

What is this new birth that Peter is talking about?
You may recall Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus
In the Gospel of John, Jesus told that religious teacher:
“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God
unless they are born again.”

This new birth happens when a person trusts in Jesus,
When we receive God's gift of forgiveness and reconciliation
through Jesus Christ, and commit ourselves to following him.

This is a new beginning of a restored relationship
With our Creator; the life God intended for us
From the very beginning.

Our deepest reason for joy
is not that our circumstances are always good,
but that we have fellowship with God.
We have been forgiven.
We have been reconciled.
We have a living hope.

But there is more.
Peter also talks about “an inheritance
that can never perish, spoil or fade.”
Peter is reminding us that the good
that God has planned for us
can never be taken away.

This life of restored fellowship with God
Is not just for now, but meant to extend into eternity.
That is after the troubles of life are finished
We have the promise of being with Jesus.

In the Gospel of John,
Jesus speaks to his disciples
About his upcoming departure.
He tells them “My Father's house has many rooms;
if that were not so, would I have told you
that I am going there to prepare a place for you?
And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come back and take you to be with me
that you also may be where I am.” [John 14:2-3]

A mansion with many rooms.
Elsewhere, Scripture describes this inheritance
As celebration, feasting, and reunion.

That upcoming flight to the Caribbean can be cancelled.
 All your wealth can be stolen or eroded by inflation.
 But God has reserved a place in Paradise for all who trust in him.
 Peter says it will never 'perish, spoil, or fade'.
 That is why Peter speaks about joy
 in the same breath as suffering.

In fact, these gifts of a new life and a secure future
 Allow us to rejoice even in times of trial and affliction.
 Trials are depleting, but these gifts are rejuvenating.
 Affliction is momentary, but these gifts are eternal.

In the midst of trial and difficulties,
 we can experience JOY because our JOY
 isn't based on momentary circumstances
 but on what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

But if this joy is available to us,
 why do we find it so difficult to experience?
 I think part of the answer is that we forget who we are.
 We forget what God has done.
 We forget what God has promised.
 Bible Scholar Tom Wright reminds us that
 "It is easy to forget our basic identity as Christians,
 and it is therefore important to be reminded of it on a daily basis."

[NT Wright The Early Christian Letters for Everyone 49]

Do we read and study the Gospel story
 or are we more devoted to keeping up with politics?
 Do we reflect on how God is showing up in our own lives
 or are we more interested in the opulence of the Kardashians?
 Do we ponder God's good promises for the future?
 Or are we strategizing how to secure our wealth
 and building bigger barns?
 We don't manufacture the fruit of the Spirit.

The Spirit produces it in us.
 But we can cultivate the soil in which that fruit grows.
 We cultivate joy by remembering the gospel,
 paying attention to God's work in our lives,
 and keeping God's promises before us.

So what does that actually look like in everyday life?
 How do we allow Christ to become more at home in us?

I was watching a video the other day
 Where people answered the question:
 How do we become like Jesus?
 Which is another way of saying
 How does the fruit of the Spirit
 become more evident in our lives?

On woman answered:
 "I think it happens as the more we allow Christ
 [to] take up residence in our life...

Jase and I moved [into this house] ten years ago
 and the couple that left had been here about 60 years
 and slowly bit by bit
 we wanted to change each room
 paint it a bit and take out the old heating
 and put some decent heating in (that kind of stuff)
 and we couldn't afford to do it all at once
 and it would be nuts so we just bit by bit transformed the house
 so now ten years on...it's kind of more my home now
 it's kind of more me...
 and I think in my journey of faith
 that's what Christlikeness is [like, it's]
 that as we allow Jesus
 to take up residence in different parts of our life
 and actually he becomes more at home in our life

and we become more at home in our life
and other people become more at home in our life
because actually there's something
about becoming more Christ-like
that means you become more human.”

[Rachel Gardner in "9-A-Day: How do we become like Jesus & Fruit 2 – Joy"]

I love that picture.
Christ doesn't simply come into our lives
and gut the entire home.
He gradually takes up residence in every room:
Our relationships. Our finances.
Our fears. Our ambitions.
Our disappointments. Our suffering.

And as Christ becomes more at home in us,
the fruit of the Spirit develops and grows
including the joy that will sustain us
even when our circumstances change.
May we give Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
more and more room. Amen.