



June 24, 2018

## Joy is Knowing What Matters Most

Pastor Jason Bryan-Wegner

### PHILIPPIANS 4:10-23NRSV

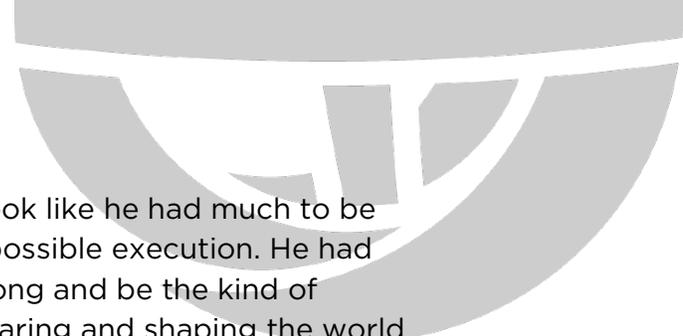
<sup>10</sup>I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup>In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

<sup>15</sup>You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. <sup>16</sup>For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. <sup>17</sup>Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. <sup>18</sup>I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup>And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup>To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

<sup>21</sup>Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The friends who are with me greet you. <sup>22</sup>All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor's household.

<sup>23</sup>The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

We're wrapping up our sermon series on Joyful Living today. Paul's letter to the Philippians has given us food for thought about what it means to live with joy. If nothing else, Paul has taught us that joy is not just an emotion brought on by external conditions like happiness or sadness. It's rooted deeper than that. It's something that comes from a sense of gratitude, from joining our lives to the life of Christ, from having relationships that encourage our faith, and goals that urge us on. In the end, joy emerges in us when we know what matters most and can hold on to those things in all circumstances.



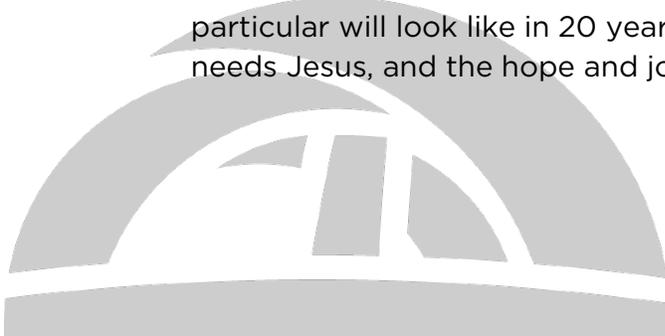
At the time Paul wrote to the Philippians, it didn't look like he had much to be joyful about. Remember, Paul was in prison facing possible execution. He had heard that the Philippians were struggling to get along and be the kind of community Christ called them to be. Rather than sharing and shaping the world around them with Christ's love, they were fighting about what the rules were for who could be part of the church and what they had to do to continue to belong. On top of this, there were some who were trashing Paul's name, trying to undermine his teaching. In a short time since Paul's last visit, this church had lost focus on what and who had formed them and what mattered most as a church.

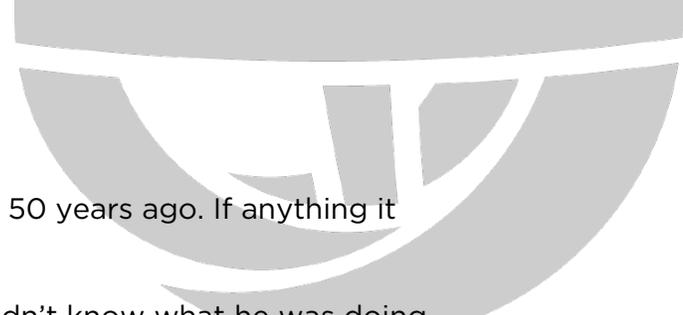
Unfortunately, it's not uncommon even today for churches and other organizations to lose focus on what matters most. Stores like Sears once had their names on the tallest buildings in the world; and now they are being devoured by companies like Amazon. It's not that we've stopped buying things, we just don't buy them out of catalogs that come in the mail anymore, or go shopping at the mall every Saturday. Sears and other stores like it made decisions about their future that failed to see that what mattered were people, not the way they sold their products.

We're not immune from this in the church either - not just at Zumbro - but most churches, even the largest ones are wondering what the future looks like as people's patterns of life and priorities change. For decades, churches have formed denominations, built buildings, and could reliably expect that those who were baptized in that denomination would grow up and find a church just like the one they were raised in. In all honesty, it hasn't worked like this in several decades. People are still asking spiritual questions, but many are not looking to the church for answers.

Here at Zumbro, our building is surrounded by the dynamic changes of DMC. Buildings are going up all around us. It's raising some big and important questions for us about our own facility and location among this growing, dynamic place. The MAP survey we just completed has provided some helpful insight about where we're at right now in our thinking. This and the further conversations we will have later this summer and fall will be important steps in helping us further clarify what matters most to us as a congregation and why we are called to serve the way we do as this community.

We could see all these changes and be overwhelmed, and I'll be honest, sometimes it is difficult to know what the church as a whole; or this church in particular will look like in 20 years or 50 years. But, it doesn't mean that the world needs Jesus, and the hope and joy he offers the world any less. Or that the





message of Jesus matters any less today than it did 50 years ago. If anything it matters more.

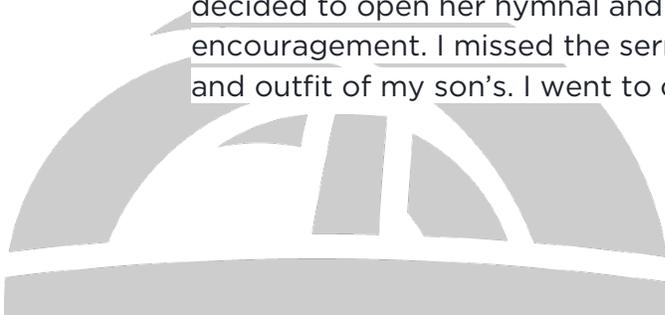
The Apostle Paul was a spiritual entrepreneur. He didn't know what he was doing when he started telling others about Jesus. He didn't have a sense of what kind of communities might form when Jews and Gentiles came together to praise the Lord. He didn't know how people would respond when women started to lead, and people started to listen. But, he had a vision and faith that this was of God and that where Christ's name was praised the kingdom of God would grow. He was thankful when he saw the church living out what mattered most, faith toward Christ, generosity toward the church and those in need, hope and joy amid challenges. And perhaps this is the same kind of spirit and faith we need today too. Perhaps God is calling us to take some bold steps into this uncharted future, to start ministries we've haven't dreamed of yet, to build partnerships that connect us more deeply with our neighborhood.

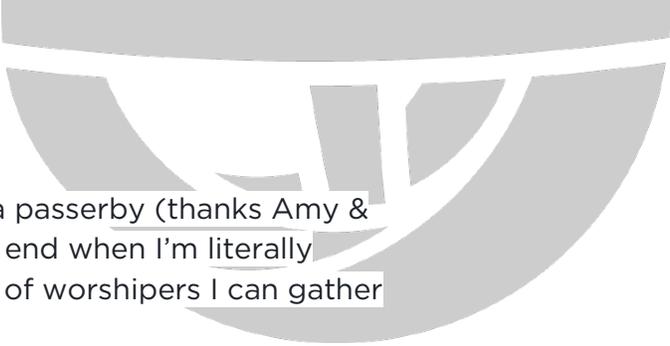
What comes out of this letter from Paul is encouragement to be resilient, hopeful, and generous because Christ is at work in us - always. Trusting that Christ will work in us, that he will bless us in our efforts, and will provide help along the way might just produce the joy we need to grow into the future that God has planned for us.

What I love about Philippians is that it is abundantly clear that being the church is not about being perfect. It's about loving and being loved in community despite its challenges and ours. Paul reminds us that being the church is about keeping the main thing the main thing; that we are given to one another to share life and hope in Jesus together, and to share this life with the world around us.

Last week, Cassie Meyer came to worship with her two little ones. Her husband Andy often works weekends, so she was single parenting that morning. Worship isn't always easy when you have little ones with you. But last week Cassie felt like she needed to be here. She had some pretty heavy things she was carrying. She had had an itchy blotchy spot on her neck for some time. And after going to the doctor and advocating that they look at it further, she found out it was melanoma. She had to have surgery to remove it and wait patiently for the pathology reports to see if it was anywhere else. It was a lot to take in in a short time. Things were not going the way you would imagine they would be going for someone not yet 30.

After worship, she said, "I'm always amazed at what can occur during the hour I go to church alone. I had to run to the front TWICE to get my daughter. Then she decided to open her hymnal and sing very loudly. She was surrounded by smiles of encouragement. I missed the sermon because I was changing a blowout diaper and outfit of my son's. I went to communion while a stranger in the pew held my





baby. After communion, I handed my toddler off to a passerby (thanks Amy & Nicole!) to head to the healing prayer station. At the end when I'm literally dripping in sweat, I'm so thankful for the community of worshipers I can gather with to sing praise and build faith."

Cassie had surgery this past Wednesday. Things are looking hopeful, but she's still waiting for the full report. When I checked in with her after surgery and asked if I could share her story about worship she said, "Absolutely! I thought about that church service during pre-op waiting, and it just gave me joy."

Hearing Cassie's story, any of us could see why she might have been overwhelmed by the challenge she faced. But because of Christ and your witness to his goodness and love, she knew what mattered most this week. What happened to Cassie in worship is just one of so many examples of why I love this church. You care for each other, you encourage one another, and you look for ways to bring joy to each other and the community around us. Do we always get it right? Of course not. The challenges we face individually and as a whole can overwhelm us at times. But when we seek to listen for God's guidance, and we trust that Christ will provide in our challenges and in our successes, we become the joy that God offers the world. Amen.

