

## SERMON

Philippians 4:1-9

Happiness and Joy

Nunawading and Waverley, 11-4-20

Dear friends in Christ,

The lock down grinds on here in Melbourne and it is getting hard to take. It is ok to feel unhappy at a time like this. You have had to convert a home into a workspace and deal with children's online learning. Businesses are in hibernation. It would be lovely to visit family and have them visit, and also come inside. Travel restrictions are very limiting. Think of those needing to see family overseas. A short while ago we could only spend an hour outside of our properties, like prisoners! And still the infection numbers remain about 10-15 per day. This is the time to take care of yourself. Do those things that lift the spirits such as phoning a friend, cooking your favourite recipe, listening to music, sleeping in, doing some online retail therapy and mail yourself a present. This is the time to be kind to yourself; and to others.

Happiness is such an ephemeral thing but **rejoicing in the Lord** remains with us. Paul mentions a few sources of joy. We can enjoy in the body of Christ a wonderful togetherness in the Lord, the unity and peace of the Holy Spirit. How many organisations have 90 people meeting together for song, inspiration, word, prayer and communion each Sunday? Paul spoke lovingly of the church, saying how **he longed for** the members at Philippi, calling them **his brothers and sisters**; they were his **joy and crown**. God has given us this family and surely this is one reason to rejoice in the Lord. Notice, too, that the Lord has given us the way of reconciliation, mutual confession and absolution, so that we can be at peace with each other and not be torn apart by anger, as Euodia and Syntyche were.

To rejoice is the opposite of being anxious, sad and weighed down by life's disappointments and miseries. Joy is not merely a human emotion but a state of the mind. It isn't based merely on things going your way but is **a joy that comes from the Lord**. It is a resurrection joy, like the joy of the first disciples who saw the Lord alive after his terrible crucifixion. The risen Christ now lives in us and we in him so that we continually share in his victory even in the worst of moments. Rejoicing occurs when we understand the smallness of our problems in comparison to the greatness of the gift of God in Christ.

Because this joy comes from our ascended Lord Jesus and not from within us, it is something we have to cultivate. Everyone of us gets upset. How do we return to joy in the Lord? I find Sunday worship uplifting, being able to hear God's word, to sing along with the hymns, and partake in the body and blood of Christ. But we cannot pull out a church service every time we feel down or frustrated.

And so we have prayer.

**Do not be anxious but in all your prayers and calls for mercy make known your requests to God with thanksgiving. And the peace of God that surpasses all human thoughts will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

Prayer is spiritual mindfulness, isn't it? The Spirit leads us to pour out our worries and upsets to the Lord. It is the beautiful moment when we trust the Lord, let go of our struggles and simply surrender to him. Praying through the Psalms is another great way for joy to return, for the Psalms utter things we want to say and they speak for us before God. When we pray and open the word of God, the Holy Spirit is giving us access to the Father's inner room where we can talk to him and he will quietly speak to us.

You cannot microwave joy. Sometimes we have to wait till the love of Christ breaks into our minds. It comes from deeper trust, deeper understanding of ourselves and long-term healing. Deeper trust, deeper understanding and healing take time. Paul is speaking of a peace and a joy **that guard our hearts and minds**. Our aim is to build up a defence of good thoughts, some key passages from Scripture, and a system of automatically reminding ourselves that we are God's chosen, his adopted children through holy Baptism.

Christians have a final hope that brings us joy. **The Lord is near**. Christ will return and restore the world to its proper functioning. The ascended Lord is working on the cosmic scale and also on the infinitely small scale to make this happen. Even now, we can begin to think of the shape of things to come as we meditate on **whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is of good repute, if anything is morally excellent, if anything praise-worthy**. We can rejoice because this is the direction the Lord is leading his world in.