St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

11th October 2026 – Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Philippians 4:4-9

REJOICE ALWAYS!

'Some things in life are bad, they can really make you mad…. So, always look on the bright side of life.' If you now have that song going over in your head, you will know it from the Monty Python movie, The Life of Brian; a song which is full of lots of sayings about how when life is bad just shrug it off, choose to look at it differently, 'give a whistle, And this'll help things turn out for the best'. It's funny, it's cute, but how much do these kinds of sayings and quips actually help us to always be happy, or contented, or at peace, or, as our theme says, to 'rejoice always'?

We know that we go through a lot of different things in life; the good and the bad, the up and the down. And as people we have always looked for ways to cope with the bad times in life, to face them, get through them, turn them around. And so, in very well-meaning ways, we have come up with sayings like; every cloud has a silver lining, worse things happen at sea, someone else is always worse off, count your blessings, if life gives you lemons make lemonade, walk on the sunny side of the street. And, in many circumstances and situations, these kinds of things are good, and helpful, if delivered in the right way and by the right person; how we choose to look at things and deal with them is important. Have you ever noticed that joy and thankfulness have little to do with people's current circumstances? A rich and successful person can still be sad and without peace because they are always searching for something more. A poor person can be very satisfied, and at peace, with their life because with love and the basics of life they believe they have all they need. So, in many ways, how we feel about what we have and what we are going through is very much related to the attitude we have towards these things.

But not always. As well-meaning as these sayings are, they have their limitations. At the loss of a loved one, a sickness, a major life-upheaval, in being told others are worse off we can easily think, 'many are better off'. We might respond that, 'the lemonade I'll make from these lemons will

be so bitter it is undrinkable'. And, 'I don't know how I will get through this cloud, let alone see what lining it has'. Have you ever gone through a situation like that, or perhaps you are in one now? When no amount of self-help, or positive thinking, or well-meant phrases and philosophies are going to help you to find peace and joy where you are right now.

'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!' (4), are the well-known words Paul gives us in our reading here. Rejoice always! How do you respond to that? It's easy for us to put this with all those other well-meant phrases and bits of advice; that if we just look at things the right way we can push through and everything will be ok. Easy to say, but not always easy to do. Sometimes helpful, but sometimes not. But before we write off what is said here, we need to look at it deeper. The word used here for 'rejoice', is not about just being happy, about going around smiling and cheerful whatever we go through. It is so much deeper than that. It is about having faith, trust, hope, and peace, that whatever we go through God is with us. It's tied in with what Paul says here about not being anxious, but instead in prayer coming to God to give everything over to Him. And that, he writes, gives us the peace which passes all our understanding, the peace which gives us joy we can live in. In many ways, what Paul is writing about here is that, when we go through the hard and tough times in life, we have a choice of not just how we look at it, but also who we look at.

But still, I can think of situations, and you most likely can too, when despite these words, this kind of peace and joy, and hope and thankfulness, is hard to find. Those times when someone close you dies and you feel so wrenched up and overwhelmed that you don't know how you will get through it. The times when you are so disappointed in something which fails to go the way you wished it would, that you lose hope. When circumstances and situations in your life just overwhelm you, so that you can't see a way forward or out. At those times even giving it over to God might not give us the peace and the hope we need at that time. Does Paul's call here have limits to what it can do, just like those other sayings we like to use to help us to look at things positively?

Well, I'm going to say that while it all comes down to faith, in finding peace and joy in God there are no limits, although sometimes it can take a while. Joy is not found in the absence of storms, but in the presence of God. Paul's words here aren't just trite sentimentality, he knew what he was

talking about. At the time he wrote this letter he was in prison for his faith, a faith for which he was eventually executed. He had been through and was going through the hard times, the struggles, the conflicts, the grief, of both life and faith. Like all other writers in the Bible, he was realistic that our life is not always a sunny glowing 'praise God for all our blessings' kind of affair. But still, in knowing those things, and going through those things, and being realistic about those things, there is an underlying peace and joy in knowing that, overall, God is still there for us, and that, ultimately, He will get us through this.

That can be hard to understand or describe, but it's about faith. I remember in 2014 crying my way through pretty much every Sunday worship service that year (I was a College Pastor at that time, so it's ok, I wasn't leading the services). The year started with the death of a 10-year family friend from cancer, then our dog of 14 years, then my grandfather, then one of my closest friends, then a lady from a previous parish who I really admired and respected. There were many times in that year when I struggled to have any kind of joy, or peace, but I knew God was with me, and I have no idea how I would have gotten through all of that without Him. Maybe that's why in worship was when it affected me the most, because I could just say, 'it's all yours God', and let it all out. I'd say that in that year I was able to rejoice always, and to have peace, but in a different kind of way to normal, because the sadness was still there too.

Perhaps then, in talking about rejoicing always, and having peace in our lives, we need to look at it differently. We can say that it's about trusting God, even when that can be a struggle; accepting that having a whistle, or walking on the sunny side of the street, or just changing our mindset isn't always going to make things instantly better. Instead, in the midst of what are sometimes our struggles, our sadness, the hard times which go along with the good, giving ourselves and everything we are going through over to God does bring us a joy and a peace which is an assurance that through God's love for us in Jesus, and the new life He brings for us, we will get through this.

There's an important bit to finish off this reading which we'll just touch on briefly for now. Not only through our faith does God help us to find a level of joy and peace in lives whatever we are going through, but Christian joy is to be contagious. How do people go catching joy from us? I'm

going to say that being over the top about it, or fake, or acting like everything is always great isn't maybe going to be the most effective witness; I know it won't work on me. So how do we do it? Be honest with our faith, what we go through. Share the joys, and the struggles, and, if it's the right situation, share how your faith helps you through the struggles. Show people the attitude you have in how you speak, act, live, treat others, and the priorities you have in life. Do people see you as always wanting more, or as being thankful for what you have? Do they receive and experience God's grace, love and forgiveness from you? God's joy and peace is something we are called to live in, and also something we are now called to share.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Perhaps we need to look at these words as not a command, or an unrealistic expectation, but as a promise; a promise that in loving us and sending Jesus to die and rise for us, God's joy and peace are with us in our life always, even when we are not really feeling them. If there is anything you are going through in your life right now, continue to bring it to Him, knowing that even as you go through it, He is there with you. Through our faith and our trust in God, in knowing He is with us even in the times we struggle in life, may we know the hope, the love, the peace, and the joy He freely wants to give to us all. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- What other sayings can you think of which we share with one another when things are going tough? In what ways are these helpful? What limitations do they have?
- Can you think of times when you found it hard to know and experience God's joy and peace in your life? How did you get through these times?
- Reflect on what it means to 'Rejoice in the Lord always', and to live in God's peace which is beyond our understanding. What changes for us if we look at these words as a promise, rather than a command?
- Are you struggling with anything in your life right now which is 'robbing the joy' from you? Is there anything which is preventing you from knowing God's peace in your life? If so, bring it to God in prayer, hand it over to Him, and ask Him to remind you that He is with you in all things.
- As Christians we are called to make our joy contagious. Can you think of any ways you can do this in your daily life?

Pray: thank God for the knowledge and assurance that He is with us at all times and in all things. Ask Him to help us to know and experience His joy whatever we go through.

Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
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