

September 11, 2016
Philippians 4:4-7

Proper 19c
Joy In Christ Alone

*Grace, mercy and peace be yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

Identity, Community, Humility. These were the daily themes in New Orleans at the National Youth Gathering. Much can be said about these three topics from the book of Philippians. In fact one could do a sermon series on this book. As I have been contemplating the message for this morning, my heart kept pushing me to our text for today. Philippians 4:4-7. (Read from the Bible). Joy was also a topic for one of the days. After all, Philippians is oftentimes called Paul's book of Joy. There is so much encouragement and joy in this book.

But Paul is writing this epistle from chains. Paul makes this clear in the first chapter. Read Philippians 1:12-13.

Paul is writing this epistle from his prison and it's full of joy. This is what hit me at the National Youth Gathering. Joy is found outside of yourself. It doesn't come from a feeling or a moment. Joy can't even be taken away from you from a tragedy or personal suffering.

The time was 9:03 am. The place. I walked into the library at my high school doing a quick errand for my second hour speech teacher, when there I saw it, Flight 175 hits the South Tower of the World Trade Center. Our Nation, 15 years was under attack. The rest of the day was filled with emotions; happiness was not found there. Back then I would have told that joy was not one of those emotions.

What happened for the days and weeks to come? Churches were hosting prayer vigils. People gathered on Sundays more than in recent memory...for a short time. You see people were looking for hope and joy. Joy that is found IN CHRIST ALONE.

That same year, 2001, the phone call came. My life was personally thrown for a loop. It was my senior year of High School, I had the desire to go to a Concordia and begin my studies to becoming a pastor, but then hearing that the pastor that I admired so much, was not living above reproach. That phone call stated he had resigned his call and his roster spot because he was caught having a 2 ½ year affair. My world was rocked. I was questioning my desire to even go into the ministry. That October evening, Joy was not found amidst my emotions...or at least I would have told you that then. Soon after, I met with a neighboring pastor...my own sr. pastor was busy with the healing needed in the congregation as a whole. I was told that day by that neighboring pastor that Joy is found in Christ Alone.

January 6, 2012. My world was torn apart. We were prepping for this day for some time. My grandpa, dad, and I were on our way to make preliminary plans for my grandma's funeral. She only had a short time left, when the phone call came as we were headed to the funeral home. This changed the pre-planning to actual funeral planning. Sadness and grief was what I knew,

but serving as a pastor and being ministered to by a pastor during this time, I was told that Joy is found in Christ Alone.

Maybe you have similar situations. Maybe your 9-11 was the day the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor or maybe it was the Assassination of JFK or RFK or MLK. Maybe it was the Columbine Disaster or the Red River Flood. You've all suffered before. You've all experienced the death of a loved one. You've all known someone to be diagnosed with cancer. You've all suffered the ramifications of a fallen sinful world. You've all suffered on the account of your own sin. You've all been in emotion overload where you thought that you had no joy in your heart.

Twisting joy and happiness is one of the devil's ways to take you from true joy. I would not fault you one bit if happiness was not one of your emotions in a season of suffering. I know it isn't for me. When happiness eludes you and you are suffering and at a weak moment in your life, perhaps your faith is even weak, maybe even rocky at best. Maybe this time of suffering has brought you to the point of even questioning if there really is a God who loves you. I get it, I've been there. That's what the devil is trying to do in those times of suffering. He's trying to steal away your Joy. He'll use all sorts of different things to do that.

Perhaps he has to try and question who you are even as a person. He tempts you to question your identity or even tempts you to change your identity. Now this identity question is a hot-button topic when it comes to gender-identity these days. But it's much more than that. Satan is trying to have you change your identity as a Child of God to something different – a child of the world, a child of the flesh, a child of Satan. In times of great loss and personal tragedy, you might question, does God really love me? Am I really worth it to God?

In times of suffering, your emotions and anxieties are on edge, and Satan uses those times to take away your humility. You become even more concerned about your own well-being than the well-being of others and the words you say to them. Trust me, I know, I've been on both sides of the equation and so have you.

In times of suffering, he tempts you to remove yourself from community, to have you hole up somewhere so you ultimately say, the Church isn't worth it. It's too hypocritical!

When pain and suffering comes it seems as if true joy isn't there. It seems as if you are losing control and giving up. We can learn a lot from St. Paul and His letter to the Philippians. It might even seem from Paul's words to them in chapter 1: (Read 1:18b-26). Paul's desire is to be with Christ, but he knows he will continue to live for that is what is needed at this time for the sake of their faith and their joy.

Even our text has Paul writing in chains and saying, "Rejoice in the Lord Always." He doesn't say, "Rejoice in the Lord Sometimes," but ALWAYS. It's because Christ has given you true joy. True joy is not found in your daily circumstances. It's not found in the world or in the flesh. True Joy is found only in Christ Alone. It's found in Christ Alone, because Christ Alone took of flesh to become one of us. Christ Alone suffered for you. HE suffered not only physical pain,

but he also suffered great shame and even separation from the Father. He suffered for your sin and mine. He took your sin and mine on His back and died. He not only took on human flesh, suffered, and died for you. He also defeated death for you! He came out of the tomb on Easter Sunday for you! He lives again for you! He lives again for you so that you can truly experience that True JOY comes in Christ Alone.

That's the good news that Paul shares with the Philippians. That's the good news that is given to you. The Good News that even as you suffer for the gospel in this world and even suffer the ramifications of a sinful and broken world is that True Joy is FOUND IN CHRIST ALONE. The Good News is what Jesus did for you on the cross and the empty tomb. True Joy is found at the Cross and the empty tomb.

Fifteen years ago, two events rocked my world and my emotions. The cross though stood out through both times very clearly. Remember the World Trade Center cross that was found amongst the rubble. That was not a coincidence, that was left by the pure grace of God to give comfort, peace and joy amidst a terrible tragedy. It wasn't just a cross formed by mangled rubble, it is the cross of Jesus Christ, the wooden beams nailed together that gives true comfort, peace and joy. It's the preaching of Christ crucified and risen from the dead that gives true comfort, peace, and joy.

When I met with the pastor after our own church tragedy and the loss of a shepherd due to his own personal sin, and even lost trust over the office, even one that I desired to enter. I was pointed to the Cross of Jesus Christ where alone God takes care of sin and forgives even sins such as that and restores the relationship with God. I was given true comfort, peace, and joy, and also regained my trust in the Office of Pastor at the Cross and the Empty tomb of Jesus Christ.

Dear fellow redeemed, Children of the Most High God, when you suffer tragedy, pain, and suffering, it is my desire that I can walk alongside of you and point you to the Cross and the Empty Tomb, not just as my office of pastor, but also as being part of the community that is found in Christ Alone, so that you can experience that True Joy is found IN CHRIST ALONE.

You not only experience the True Joy that is Found IN CHRIST ALONE during suffering, you experience True Joy every Sunday that you gather with the Community IN CHRIST ALONE to receive Forgiveness through the Absolution. You experience true Joy as you hear God's Word read and preached. You receive true joy when you come to the Table of the Lord, where Jesus again gives to you forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Your joy is FOUND IN CHRIST ALONE! Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

