

“It’s About Joy!”  
 Sermon for 32 July 2017  
 Texts: Ephesians 1:3-10; Psalm 81

My study bible points out that the passage we read this morning is one, long elegant sentence in the Greek. It didn’t say, exuberant. It could have. It starts off with, **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. It is so tempting to get right into the long title, the careful enumeration of the exact relationship between Father and Son in the godhead *as if that is the main point of Paul’s effusive joy!* It is gladness loosed and joy unfettered that propels this torrent of praise from Paul. Joy is the propellant, praise is the vehicle.

**Bless be God . . . who has blessed us in Christ with very spiritual blessing that heaven might hold of us . . . those chosen in him, before the foundation of the world!** Such generosity of spirit, such abounding love . . . it is the picture of someone holding nothing back! How grand! How deserving of our worship, grateful, informed, full-throated joyful adoration, joyful.

When you go in for your spiritual check-up, joy is a vital sign. It is a sign that you are alive! Joy is what you ought to be feeling, ought to be experiencing if indeed you have any knowledge of, memory of, or experience of God. Let it be put plainly, friends if we knew God better it would be easier for us to rejoice in Him—not for his gifts, which are many, not for his spiritual blessings, of which there is a deluge of abundance, and not even for truth, which with him is certain; but in him for himself:

**And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. John 17:3**

If we know Him, we have eternal life. You think that would suffice as a cause for joy and rejoicing! But if there is no joy, you are not alive the way you ought to be alive! Such a person could hear Paul’s words and yawn! Or stifle a yawn . . . just to be polite.

Here’s a second thing, after rejoicing in him for himself, that marks us and it is this: the entire proclamation of the good news is presented in terms synonymous with joy: a betrothal, a marriage feast, a homecoming, a healing and deliverance, a festive banquet! There is joy in coming into a great treasure, in catching the world’s largest lake trout (caught and released by a man named Sidney, on July 3, 2017, in the Flaming Gorge Reservoir, Utah: 48” long, weighing in at 57#’s), or even in a large catch of fish (153 large ones!) like Peter and Andrew on the Sea of Galilee (John 21:11)! The promise of thrones in glory and of the final overthrown of Satan and all the demons.

There joy in healing the sick, the blind, the halt, the dumb and the deaf. Joy in driving out demons and in raising the dead! Repeatedly the people’s response to Jesus’ wonders was joy, and praising and glorifying God! But joy. Joy frequently made its presence known at these messianic events. Such things had been prophesied, now they were fulfilled before people’s very eyes. **Jesus was the embodiment of messianic joy.** People were more than glad to see him, more than happy to welcome him, and loved to have him around *because whenever he went he brought joy!*

**That we should be holy and blameless before him.** How do we wrap our minds around such a spiritual and moral attainment? Our life experience does not encourage us to think we can ever achieve that! And it certainly is not possible on our own, by our own efforts, skill and application. The standard is “perfection”—perfect obedience and perfect joy. Two things that only Jesus ever possessed. We are both **holy and blameless before him** only because we are previously **in Him, blessed in Christ.**

It is possible to see “**our predestination for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ** which is **according to the purpose of his will**” as the “WHY and the cause” of all this rejoicing. That we become **holy and blameless** through an **adoption** process as plainly set forth, or described in Scripture as “through grace, by faith in Christ alone.” Add to this, the astounding *newness of it all*, here are things revealed that were never revealed before!! And all that (adoption, obtaining righteousness) shouldn’t stint, diminish or hinder our joy at all! Truthfully, it should elevate, excite, or cause (or provoke and produce) joy in us—just to think—what joy!— that God’s plan throughout all eternity was to restore us to himself, make all things gone wrong, right again!

We should exult with joy, too:

- 1 Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever!**
- 2 Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,  
whom he has redeemed from trouble {or, From the  
hand of the foe}**
- 3 and gathered in from the lands,  
from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.**
- 4 Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to a city to dwell in;**
- 5 hungry and thirsty,  
their soul fainted within them.**
- 6 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress.**
- 7 He led them by a straight way  
till they reached a city to dwell in.**
- 8 Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,  
for his wondrous works to the children of man!**

Psalm 107, ESV

It’s all about joy. **He has blessed us in the Beloved.** (v.6) Hear the joy as Paul enumerates: 1. **redemption through his blood**, which is 2. **the forgiveness of our trespasses**; according to 3. **the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us**; 4. **making know to us the mystery of his will —set forth in Christ—for the fullness of time** (that would be “right now!”); ultimately to 5. **unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.** This fivefold declaration (some would break it down into ten, or eleven categories) is like a flash flood of blessings—a sudden infilling without the destructiveness!

Joy is natural, even reasonable in view of all these blessings; but it is also compulsory. Or, if you prefer, joy is commanded, not just a suggestion, nor a spiritual

elective as if our response to God is a multiple choice option. With regard to God's goodness towards us, we should be a. satisfied, b. indifferent, c. discouraged, d. disheartened, or e. disappointed, or 6. joyful. (circle which most applies to you). Or how about this: Rank your gratitude to God on a scale of 1 to 10: 1. being completely ungrateful (or dissatisfied) and 10 being grateful joy (blissful contentment). Paul's apparent, enthusiastic assessment is: it's a 10, a 10!

Maybe you just aren't a very enthusiastic person. Maybe you are a dispositional 5—not extremely negative, not fanatical about anything. “Moderation is the key.” You look to the Wisdom literature for back-up and support. Of course, it's a little difficult to balance this moderate evenness with Jesus' sharp rebuke to the Laodiceans (Revelation 3:15-17 English Standard Version (ESV))”

**15 “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”**

I suggest that this not be written off as an isolated instance of spiritual disaffection—and that the lack of joy in Laodicea is sinful, not just an error in judgment, or a mistake.

And lest we be tempted to make the same mistake as the Laodicean church, I refer us to Psalm 81, which we shared this morning. **Sing aloud to God our strength, shout for joy to the God of Jacob!** (v.1) It says! What extraordinary ideas? Sing **aloud** and **shout for Joy?!** And just where do you think we are supposed to engage in these “loud” activities? When? In worship? Oh, right, at VBS, or summer camp tent meetings, at a public revival? (Most of the really big, important revivals were extra-mural—outside the walls of the church!) Well, no? Not exactly. These *exhortations* were for worship in the temple, public worship in the house of God. And while the temple times has expired, there is no apparent expiration date on this commandment! It's a psalm for Pete's sake! And unless we decide that this is clearly one of those things “best to sing about” (nostalgically), *and never intend do (What would the neighbors think?!*). Rather like some of those weird things Jesus, the apostles and disciples, used to do like hearings, deliverances and resurrections—things we prefer to read about, pray about and sing about, well, because, just because . . . I, for one, and deeply moved (as well as puzzled) by the foreign missions reports where some ministers (safely abroad) and visiting evangelists are “old school” enough, daring enough to actually **participate** in some such spiritual rowdiness. Over there, where, as everyone knows, things are less civilized, modern and less polite/proper. It is as if the gospel over there has muscles, but over here is more about brains! We have it better because our God is safer? You know, that is uninviting and unexciting!

How we need to ditch this notion of a safe, “religious God” for the better and truer appellation: he is our good God! Pay attention. I did not say, as some of may have heard, a good God; rather I pointedly said: our good God. Lucy in Lewis' Narnia must learn this crucial truth! A good God is not something to be humble about, or quiet about, or certainly not lukewarm about! No, our good God is something to shout about. Our God, the one we are personally united with through Christ—essentially and eternally ours—that God, whom we know and love and serve . . . that one! He is good. Not an absentee Lord, not a retired

divinity, remote, removed and indifferent. He is good, not ambivalent, neutral not hostile, and while he is still angry at sin (it provokes him still) *he has made it very clear that sinners have been bought out, and brought out from under the wrath—at price to him, but freely offered to us!* And that is something to sin out loud about.

Now, in case we are the least bit confused about accompaniment—as in the use of musical instruments, the psalmist urges us **to sound the tambourine** (I think that means we are to raise a racket, a percussions racket, by thumping on our tambourines!) Nice, one can participate with a limited skill set! (An even rhythm, at tempo, would be pleasant though!) We are encouraged to use stringed instruments (These lyre and harp players exist in our day but they aren't typically members of a worship band. Their instruments are more developed and complex, too.) I guess pianos and guitars qualify—they are prominent today! **And blow the trumpet.** I think that the original word stands for “horns,” forerunners of the current members of the modern brass ensemble with valves, slides, mutes and mouth pieces. I was intrigued that on the day that I first reviewed Psalm 81 a second *shofar* came into my possession (a family heirloom!), appeared on my bureau! And, yes, I did blow it. Caused quite the stir in the house as this blast was loud, unanticipated and “alien.” But *impressive!* Therefore, in the guise of the ancient orchestra for praise—we find a variety of loudness, producing exuberant sounds, making joyful music to accompany joy-filled lyrics! *And the Lord commands us to replicate these practices in our own hour! Sing aloud . . . shout . . . raise a song . . . make a joyful racket* unto the Lord, **For it is a statute for Israel, a rule of the God of Jacob. He made it a decree in Joseph.** (vv. 4-5)

We need God-centered worship . . . of the joyous variety because we are made for praise. When we do what we are made for we experience fulfillment and joy. Yes, the better we know him, the easier (happier and more fulfilling) it is to obey him. When we rejoice in Him, he rejoices in us . . . how he loves to bless us still.

**Amen.**