

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS JOY

Philippians 4:4-9

Newbegun United Methodist Church

July 8, 2018

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The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. You have been asked to promise to prepare your heart to receive and you have promised to practice each week a fruit of the spirit. Last week we were to practice love. How did you do? I hope you were successful and might have a story to tell. This week we move onto joy, the second of nine fruits of the Spirit.

What is joy; just what IS joy? It's important for us. It is mentioned over 200 times in the OT and NT. Paul uses it 21 times and the Letter to the Philippians is often referred to as the Epistle of joy. It seems to me that God wants people to live joy-filled lives and that when they do, then they walk in God's ways. However, do not confuse joy with happiness. They are not the same. Joy is not feeling giddiness of being bubbly around the clock. Joy is so much deeper, than that. Joy is not found in things, it is found within us. A Christian theologian defined joy this way: Joy is contentment in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as God causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the Word and in the world." I can use that definition. I kind of like it. You see, joy is not at all dependent on our past, current, or future circumstances, but is dependent upon the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. Here, again is the mystery of the spirit – you cannot

produce your own joy and neither can you have joy without your participation.

Therefore, you and the Holy Spirit work together to create joy in your life.

Hence, today we will look at ways in which you and the Holy Spirit together can cultivate joy in your daily walk with Jesus. Before we do, let us pray: Lord we promise to practice the fruit of the spirit which is joy and we pray with all our heart that you will help us so that together it becomes a real part of who we are and who we want to be. Amen.

Cultivating joy begins by eliminating some of our joy-breakers. There are many of them out there, but here are a few. A joy-breaker to watch out for is the habit of complaining or criticizing. The Scripture says, "Do everything without complaining or arguing." I am pretty sure this was said to and about the church. I am sure it is a universal right to complain about Army food, or bad bosses, or life in general, but when it comes to the New Community of the church, there is no place for it. It is a joy breaker and does nothing but rob the fellowship of joy.

Another type of joy-breaker to avoid is bitterness. This is resentment, even anger, over something long since passed. At one time a friend of mine got really upset over a four-dollar part for his dishwasher. It was quite insignificant but he couldn't give it up. So he kept bringing it up. Finally his wife said to him, "You are letting those people live rent-free in your head." Those people were the ones who sold him the bad part. If this can happen with small irritations, imagine what it does to us when they are considered major? In Ephesians it reads, "Get rid of all bitterness and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." Those things only bring loss of joy.

A third joy-breaker to watch out for is the current situation – whatever it may be. When we are not careful we can slip into the habit of allowing every less-than-pleasant event to take away our joy. Every day there will be a situation that will try to take away your joy – a simple situation or a major one. It is not worth it to let the daily stresses of life rob you of your joy. Recently I have noticed many books and articles and talk shows about “How to live in today.” Books like, *The Power of Now; Living today, or Today is all you Have*. I am not suggesting we burn those books. I am sure they have some validity and some common sense, but getting the best out of a day, or being aware of what is happening to you today, is not what I am talking about. Those books and philosophies still deal with the current circumstances you find yourself in that day. What they leave out is the joy of God’s presence which transcends any situation. Looking at the present day and circumstance has the consequence of making our joy come and go. Joy becomes a temporary thing, depending on the day and circumstance instead of an eternal, everlasting thing. Joy-breakers are concentrating on earthly circumstances. Eternal joy concentrates on the present, past, and future presence of God. Joy is trusting and resting in God. That is why Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “Be joyful, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances.” “Our joy is in the strength of the Lord.” (Psalms)

In addition to eliminating joy-breakers we can cultivate joy-builders. There are things we can do each day to build up the joy that the Holy Spirit wants to bring into your life. I like what Paul wrote that was read in our lesson this morning from Philippians, “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy –

think about such things.” Think of those things – that is really great advice. There are a lot of beautiful things around us that we could praise God for. There are many beautiful people around us that we can thank God for. Spend time and thought and prayers on those things. Spend time with good, uplifting friends and family. Spend time with beautiful music. Spend time with the Word of God. Spend time alone in the presence of God. The more we learn to acknowledge and appreciate the beauty of Christ in the Word and in the world, the more we experience the joy of the Holy Spirit.

The next thing I want to mention is to strive to be a joy-bringer. Make it your objective this week to bring joy into the lives of someone else. Promise God you will do this every day for the next week. A friend of mine told me “I need to go visit my parents, but I just don’t have the energy to listen to them pick and bicker at each other for an entire evening.” You know what he means? Do you know people that suck the energy and joy out of you just by being around them? Sure you do. That is not going to be you this week. Your mission is to bring joy to those around you so that when you leave they will say; I feel better just talking to him or her. Your promise is to be a joy-bringer. And it has its benefits. Proverbs 11 says, “Those who cheer others will themselves be cheered.”

The fruit of the spirit that is joy is a constant in your life. It really is about living constantly in the presence of God, pursuing God’s presence, praising God’s presence, and resting in God’s presence. Nothing can take that away from you – nothing. Joy is not happiness; it is a soul-deep presence that the Holy Spirit and you maintain because it is within you as a fruit of the spirit. Amen.