

Rejoice Philippians 4:4-13 Pentecost 19 (23a) Oct 11, 2020

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus
Philippians 4:4-8 Rejoice

Brothers and sisters in Christ, many of you will say there isn't much to rejoice about in 2020. School was canceled, but not just school. The coronavirus canceled everything, from football games to graduations and family reunion and even getting a cup of coffee together. Some got sick and some have died for whatever and we couldn't even gather to mourn together. The weather has been odd. There have been more storms than we would expect all the way to delta. And while we may have escaped the Derecho and avoided drought, it wasn't far from our minds. Wildfires dimmed our skies a bit and devastated California. On top of all that, non-stop talking about how the someone not only won't protect you, they will sell you out to some nefarious special interest as the election approaches. All this makes it hard to rejoice, as Paul says. In fact, you might be ready to tell Paul he doesn't know what kind of year you have had.

But maybe we should consider the kind of year Paul was having - in prison in Rome, with some preaching the Gospel to stir up trouble for him. Considering his own death. Long separation from those he loves where they have no ability to know how he is or they are, and what he does hear is reports that women he worked with were fighting. That is his situation. That was his year. Yet still he says 'Rejoice'.

How? How can he say rejoice in a year like that, and how can we say it in a year like ours? Because I could use some rejoicing.

And Paul shows us how. He doesn't just say rejoice, he says rejoice in the Lord, always. He doesn't tell you to look to your circumstances, to your bank account, to your harvest, to your day, to your spouse or children. He tells you to look to and rejoice in the Lord. And he says it again, rejoice.

Our circumstance do not define us. Our Lord defines us. And how does he define us? He said we were loved even when we were lost in sin and sent His son to die for us. Rejoice. Our God tells us we are his own in the flood of grace that is baptism, where we are united with Christ through the flood of grace that God gives. We are given the very name of God and become his children, in an act that can never be undone. Rejoice. we have his word, that can never be broken, telling us we are redeemed. Rejoice. The very Spirit of God tells us we are God's children. Rejoice.

Yet there are things that are hard to rejoice in. Truthfully, we cannot rejoice on our own. When we are alone in our troubles we cannot rejoice. But Paul doesn't tell us to do that. Paul does he is content in all circumstances, that in want or plenty he knows the secret of being content. But he doesn't say rejoice alone. His secret? The Lord is at hand in all circumstances - He is not alone- rejoice. In fact, rejoice always. When we know God's word, the spirit connects us through it to Christ. When Do we hunger, we remember that Christ hungered for us in the wilderness and the angels ministered to him. We are not alone. God uses even our hunger to let

us see his son. Rejoice. If we thirst the spirit reminds us of Jesus who thirsted at the cross. We are not alone. Rejoice. If we have plenty, the spirit reminds us of the feast God inaugurates on his mountain as he brings salvation and swallows up death. We remember Jesus promise that he is the living water and he our true sustenance. Rejoice. When we have a bad diagnosis, when we even face death, the spirit reminds us of He who walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death, who carried his cross and was raised on the third day. God shared our sufferings in Christ so that we would be raised to Glory with Christ. We are not alone. He brings us to rejoice.

Christ carried the our cross as he went to die for us. In our troubles we are united with him who carries us. And he who bore our woe bids us bear each others. We have word, we have sacrament, we have the consolation of the saints. We give that consolation to others that they too may rejoice. Christ endured the cross for the joy set before him, the salvation of the world. In our cross we bear witness to the cross and that same joy, that others too may know the joy of the Lord. We participate in the very joy of the Lord when Christ shines in us.

God with us. We have ample reason to rejoice. Even our sufferings testify to Him. So rejoice in the Lord, my friends. I will say it again rejoice.