

Trinity United Methodist Church
October 11, 2020--Laity Sunday
Rivers of Life Service
“Think On These Things”
Karen Waters—Associate Lay Leader

Scripture: Philippians 4:1-9 (NIV)

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! **2** I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. **3** Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **8** Finally, brothers and sisters, 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. **9** Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Video: “Nobody” lyric video—Casting Crowns

Message

As we begin today, let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we pray that You will be here with us as we listen to Your word today and take it with us to live out this week. We pray that we will think on the things that make our lives point to You. In Your name we pray, amen.

I chose the song “Nobody” to start us out with today because to me, it sums up the definition of Laity. Mark Hall (not Trinity's Mark Hall, but Casting Crowns' lead singer) explained in an interview that the inspiration for the song was John the Baptist. In a quote from the interview, he said:

*“There was a day that came when John the Baptist could’ve had his moment to make a name for himself. Everyone came to him and said, ‘Who are you? Tell us who you are so we can go tell everyone else.’ He says, ‘I am just a voice out here in the wilderness.’ It sounds like a poetic statement, but what he’s saying is just straight. ‘I’m nobody. You don’t need to know me. I’ve got nothing for you. [Y]ou’re going to meet me and you’re going to leave, [but] the thing that’s gonna last is going to be Jesus.’ Because [John] knew, **I’m not the point.** I’m here to point to the point [Jesus].”* – Mark Hall (Lead Singer, Casting Crowns)

I wanted to just hit on two things about the chorus/refrain in “Nobody”:

I’m just a nobody, trying to tell everybody / All about Somebody who saved my soul / Ever since You rescued me, You gave my heart a song to sing / I’m living for the world to see nobody but Jesus...

Jumping to the middle, it reminds us of the joy that’s ours when we let God take us over:

“Ever since You rescued me, You gave my heart a song to sing.” When do we feel like singing? Some of us, never. But if we *do* get that urge to sing, whether it’s along with a song on the radio, in the shower, humming along with a song here in church, it’s usually when we’re feeling...*happy*. Right?

Going back to that first line of the chorus, though, that very first part sounds kinda negative, don’t you think? Usually being considered a “nobody” isn’t a compliment, whether you’re seen that way by yourself or others. In this case, though, that “nobody” is turned around and becomes a positive. As Dan has said in the past, this is a case of being *self-less*: Not thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves *less*.

Toward the end of today’s scripture reading, instead of selfish thoughts, Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8 what we should be thinking about:

“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Our world is full of things to think about, isn’t it? All kinds of demands on our mental space. Much of which is not exactly beneficial for our state of mind. It’s a great time to take a deep dive into Paul’s words and try to reorient our thinking and really consider what it is that’s worth occupying our minds.

As Dan has also mentioned in recent weeks, this is a great time to take your time as you worship. Since we aren’t allowed to sing, we can focus more clearly on the words in the music we’re hearing, the prayers, the scripture and the messages. Let the meanings sink in a little bit more.

In her book titled *In All Things: A Nine-Week Devotional Bible Study On Unshakable Joy*,” Melissa B. Kruger points out that Philippians can be summarized as an invitation to joy written by an imprisoned apostle Paul to believers in the early church who were suffering from opposition. Paul’s joy was unshakable. Where did he find such depths of contentment and peace in such dire circumstances? Can we learn it, too? Could it be that the antidote to our overloaded mental spaces is the same as it was when Paul wrote this letter?

First of all, in verse 4 in today’s reading, Paul says, “Rejoice in the Lord.” Of course! If we believe in everything the Lord’s done for us, why wouldn’t we, right? Then he says it again. “I will say it again: Rejoice!” By themselves, his words would be a nice little cheery reminder to always be happy, find your joy in every day, if it doesn’t ‘spark joy,’ do the *Marie Kondo* thing and get rid of it, etc. But Paul didn’t just say “Rejoice.” He said, “Rejoice in the Lord **always**.” **Always!** What? Not just when it’s convenient and I don’t have a thousand other things to think about? Not just when something really spectacularly great happens? Not just when things are going well for me and it’s easy for me to rejoice? *Always*, Paul said. And then said it again: “I will say it again: Rejoice!” That’s how important this is.

James, chapter 1, verses 2 through 4, says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” While we know that God doesn’t cause the various trials we face, He most certainly can use them to cause us to find true joy or comfort only in Him. He wants to meet us in the midst of our trials and guide us through the tough times in life that try to rob us of the abundant joy that He can provide.

So how do we do this? How do we meet God and allow Him to guide us through the tough seasons in our lives? Paul goes on in Philippians chapter 4 to say, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Don’t worry about anything. Um, okay...I know I wish I could snap my fingers and say—and mean—“OK, I’m not going to worry any more.” But in reading on, we see that what Paul’s really saying is, “The worries aren’t going to magically go away. We need to take those worries and get on our knees or whatever your method of prayer might be. Don’t cling to the worry, but hand it over to God—and don’t try to take it back from Him when you’re done with your conversation. Don’t dwell on the worry, but *know* that God hears you and He’s going to provide.”

Remember Trinity’s Scripture theme from Matthew 6? (Matt. 6:25-29) “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body,

what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. (Matt. 6:33-34) But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

I'm still learning that all the things that can go wrong in the course of everyday life do **not** automatically have the power to steal my joy. It's when I *allow* another driver, something someone said, *reading the news*, or just getting up on the wrong side of the bed to take over the space in my mind and heart that I should be using to focus on more worthy things that my joy fades into the background. We have to actively *choose* to reorient our hearts and minds in order to be carriers of joy.

And before we forget, in today's reading in Philippians 4, there's that sentence in between Rejoicing and Don't Worry. "Let your gentleness be evident to all." The interpretation of this verse in *The Message* translation is interesting: "Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them." An earlier paraphrase said, "Let all the world know that you'll meet them halfway." It goes along with what we've been hearing about interacting constructively with one another, really listening to each other, and being teachable. But also, coming on the heels of Paul's instruction that we should "Rejoice in the Lord *always*," the implication here is that what we have to share is joy in knowing God's grace.

So how do we reorient our thinking to get into a mindset of joy, of rejoicing in the Lord *always*, in spite of the influences and worries that the world puts on us? Paul gives us the answer to the question of what should be occupying our minds when he writes: "Finally, brothers and sisters, 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."

Paul implies in this directive that there are enough of these qualities out there in the world to not only fill us up, but to give us shareable joy. He's saying, Go find Christ in the world. Think about these things, fill yourself up with these things, and live these things.

Then he says we should live in community with one another: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." It's not part of today's scripture reading, but further in

Philippians 4, verse 13, Paul says, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” And in Nehemiah Chapter 8, verse 10, we read, “The **joy** of the Lord is our strength.”

As Casting Crowns sang in the song *Nobody*, “[Jesus] picked 12 outsiders nobody would have chosen and [He] changed the world.” We have the same Holy Spirit in us that the original disciples had. He wants to take our brokenness and transform our hearts into greater reflections of His goodness and grace that we can then share with the world. He wants us to be a people so joyful that there is no other explanation for our joy other than God is with us.

When I was working on this message for today, I actually wondered at times if I’d be able to come up with anything that would make sense to anyone. I struggle with the concept of *rejoicing **always**, in all things*, as much as anyone, and often I’m driving that struggle bus. But God has told me, and all of us, through Paul, what should be occupying our minds, whether we’re in that mindset of joy, or—and I would go so far as to say especially when we’re really *not* feeling that joy. He tells us to think on the things that are:

- True
- Honorable
- Just
- Pure
- Pleasing
- Commendable
- Excellent
- Praiseworthy

In closing, Paul tells us, in Romans this time, chapter 12 (verses 1 and 2), how to apply what we’re thinking of to our everyday lives. Here are his words from *The Message* translation:

“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out.”

Thanks be to God. Amen.