



Sermon Transcript July 21, 2019

Summer Sermons Glorify God With Joy Psalm 100

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on July 21, 2019 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Rev. Daniel Warriner. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Psalm 100 *A Psalm for giving thanks.*

¹ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!

² Serve the LORD with gladness!

 Come into his presence with singing!

³ Know that the LORD, he is God!

 It is he who made us, and we are his;
 we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise!

 Give thanks to him; bless his name!

⁵ For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Introduction

What brings you joy? What comes into your mind when you think about joy? Does your family bring you joy? Does your career bring you joy? How about your car or your smartphone? The answer to these questions are important. My red sneakers make me happy, but would I say they bring me joy? How about playing and coaching baseball? Those things make me happy, and I enjoyed this past season of coaching the kids and working with the other coaches, but would I say all of it brings me joy?

Maybe you're familiar with the KonMari Method for simplifying your house. Marie Kondo coined the name of this method with her book The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up. She proposes that we ask ourselves this question as we tidy our homes: What things will bring you joy if you keep them as part of your life?¹ That's a valid question. But does it misuse the word joy here?

Today our text is Psalm 100. This psalm describes joy as being significant in our response to God. I'd like to read Psalm 100 to you as we begin.

Joy is Essential to Worship. What is Joy?

What is joy? What brings you joy? What began as a simple question turned me deeply into research as I prepared for today. When the psalmist commands us to make a "joyful noise to the Lord" I always assumed this psalm existed to give me patience with people who couldn't sing well. So, it strengthened me as I endured sitting next to you as you sang your joyful "noise" of praise. You know who you are.

The more I sat with this Psalm, the more I saw how joy is pivotal in understanding how we enter into God's presence. Joy is instrumental in how our life and practice of faith is to be lived out. This Psalm is a theological expression of how and where we find our joy. And right off the bat with this Psalm my question is – how can I enter into God's presence with joy?

In his book, Faithful Feelings, Matthew Elliot² looks closely at biblical emotions. He

examines the cultural use and the grammatical usage in the New Testament to understand how emotions are portrayed in the text. There is no doubt that emotions are significant to the life of faith. Throughout the Bible we see God expressing emotion. And they are part of our lives as we are made in his image. They are part of what it means to be human. They are an important part of life. But there is the need to pay attention and use caution because it's possible to let our emotions dominate and to accidentally over-emphasize the role of our emotions in the life of our faith. So instead of knowing they are part of our lives, some people let emotions guide them. This can lead you to seek out emotionally high experiences of worship. This is just one way that worship becomes about us – when it feeds into my needs. So, there must be a balance here. We need to put down deep intellectual roots to form our minds and hearts together. Elliot also adds that joy, while very similar to happiness, joy is more foundational. He calls it a bedrock confidence that operates separate from our moods. Joy is a happiness that remains regardless of what might be happening around us. A sense of well-being that has nothing to do with outward circumstances.³

The notion that our worship and our joy belong together is not a new one. This is a common thread of the Christian faith. I'm reminded of the Westminster Shorter Catechism,⁴ a confession of the faith from around the time of the Reformation. It begins with this first question: *What is the chief end of man?* The answer to this question: *Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.* I love that my joy is only complete when I am glorifying God and enjoying him. I imagine a circle here. My delighting in God through his Word, through worshiping with others, through serving people or through being in a close community – all of these things feed my faith and point me to glorify him and honor him as my Lord and Master. Glorifying God and enjoying him. Enjoying him and glorifying him. Joy is a feeling. But it is also more than a feeling. It is a confidence that comes through knowing the only true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

If you've ever heard of John Piper's book, Desiring God, he develops this concept in thoughtful detail. He says that God is most glorified when I am most satisfied in him.⁵ I came across his definition of joy. Piper says, "*Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the Word and in*

the world.” ⁶ That’s worth repeating. It’s a fruit that the Spirit of God works into our lives as we do the ordinary things of being a Christian.

As the Psalm continues in verse three, it says, “Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his, we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.” There is an obvious stress on the work that God has done. Notice how often the pronouns for God are used. It’s HIS presence, HE is God, HE made us, we are HIS people, sheep of HIS pasture, they are HIS gates and HIS courts, give thanks to HIM, and bless HIS name, HIS love and HIS faithfulness endure to all generations. If you read this psalm and stop at the question of what brings YOU joy, you’ve misread the psalm! YOUR joy can only exist because you were made to enjoy HIS work! The second half of the Psalm give you the reason why the first half can exist! Your joy and your gladness come as a result of recognizing what God has done for you. Joyful worship can only be your proper response because of what God has first done.

His Steadfast Love Endures: Christians Have Access to True Joy

As we are thinking about focusing on God’s work. What is the work that God has done that causes us to respond with joy as we worship? Well, I’m glad you asked. At the time these psalms were sung in worship, God had revealed himself intimately to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God formed them into the people group Israel. He protected them. He established his covenant love with them through Moses and gave them the Torah law. He promised to bless them in their obedience. He promised they would always have a shepherd and that they would always be the sheep of his pasture. And you probably know where the story leads. Though God created us to tend the world as his caregivers, we made a mess of things and fail at loving God and glorifying God and enjoying God like we should, we fail at loving others to the best of our ability, and we fail at taking care of ourselves like we should. But it was into the mess of life that Jesus came into the world.

Here’s our Christmas in July moment. At Christmas we celebrate Jesus as God born in the flesh. We call this miracle the Incarnation. Jesus took on flesh and was born of the virgin Mary. And in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. He lived a life pleasing to God. He always entered into God’s presence with thanksgiving and joy and praise. Jesus

always gave thanks to his father in heaven and blessed his name. Yet, he willingly took the task of being crucified for the punishment for sin and was buried. But for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, he rose from the dead victorious over death and the grave and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

We are a people formed by this message. We do not gather here Sunday after Sunday to hear all the wonderful singers and admire the handsome pastoral staff and preaching cohort members. We gather here because the greatness of God has been revealed to us and we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit in us to make us new and transform us from once being dead and broken who are now alive and nevertheless still are broken but being mended by the power of God.

I firmly believe our joy, for it to be true joy, needs to be deeply rooted in Christ and his finished work on the cross and his resurrection. That needs to be firmly placed in our hearts and minds. Because Jesus lived and died, my hope in life and in death is that I am joined with him. My joy is anchored in him. My faith must be robust - touching all parts of my life - theologically, intellectually, and emotionally – all of me. This helps me grow as I understand the Gospel message. Our joy is cruciform. The shape of our joy is the shape of the cross because it is by the cross that Jesus is crowned with all power and authority in heaven and on earth. It also reminds me that I, too, have a cross to bear as I lay down my life for the sake of Christ and in his service. If this is an area where you want to develop, I highly recommend you spend some time reading the Psalms – especially the Psalms of lament. Pay close attention to how the Psalmists speak about their lives- the good, the bad, and the ugly- and how they lift their whole selves up to God in worship.

I recently took a Theological DNA test – you know, they sell them online – turns out I'm part pilgrim. Well, the pilgrim deep down in me really appreciates the old Congregational minister, Jonathan Edwards. The earliest sermon that we have of his is when he was eighteen years old and it's entitled, *Christian Happiness*.⁷ He calls it happiness, but it seems like he is using happiness and joy synonymously. He summarizes why Christians can be

joyful and happy people, “whatever his outward circumstances.” He points out three things that I think are worth sharing.⁸ I think these three points are very comforting and have made it into my regular reflections. They summarize why Christians can be people who embody true joy in a way that someone who isn’t a Christian cannot fathom.

1. Their “bad things” will work out for good (Romans 8:28)
2. Their “good things” cannot be taken away: adoption into God’s family, justification in his sight, joined in union with him – (Romans 8:1)
3. Their “best things” are yet to come – life in heaven, new heavens and the new earth, resurrection (Rev 22:1 ff).

For the Christian, these things are true with whatever your outward circumstances. God will use the bad things in our lives. The good things cannot be taken away. And the best thing of all, we are still waiting for - life in heaven in the new heaven and the new earth and the return of Jesus our King.

Joy Comes Slowly

But, the cold hard truth is that some of you are going through a period where your faith journey feels like it’s stalled, or you feel distant and cold in your love for God. Or maybe you’ve come to church today and you saw I was preaching about joy and you wanted to leave. If you are being honest with yourselves you’d say how you are just not feeling anything that resembles joy today. I have been talking about the joy that our faith brings over time. But I also acknowledge, day to day life is hard! We live in a broken world. We live in a world of genocide, and hunger, and sickness, and death. That’s the world we live in. And it can be all too easy to think that I stand here telling you to ignore all that and smile in the midst of it all. I want to be firm with you and tell you that’s NOT what I’m preaching here today. Nor do I think that’s the Biblical message of joy, either.

The Bible acknowledges deep pain throughout Scripture. Emotional, physical, and spiritual pain – it’s all there. We follow a savior who laid down his life on a cross to bring us together. Yet, here, in American Christianity, (and probably elsewhere) some have lost

the ability to hold onto the hard things in our lives that are still broken. We've lost sight in the cruciform nature of our faith, taking the shape of the cross. Even when your grief is difficult, come into his presence with thanksgiving. If you lost someone, it can't be replaced this side of eternity. Your loss remains even as your pain changes over time. Enter his courts with thanks and give him praise even if your thanks and praise mingle with bitter tears. We can still enter into his presence when life is complicated. Know that your complicated grief will slowly give way to complicated joy. Enter into his presence and you will begin to see his goodness and his faithfulness.

I have a confession for you. I have a mixed relationship with Christian programming on TV and radio stations. Let me tell you why. Throughout my day, I'm with various grieving families and lonely and dying people and traumatic grief. I watch on TV in nursing homes as preachers stand and spout overused and shallow Christian expressions. When I get to the car and need to clear my head, sometimes I turn on the radio. I desire to turn my focus back to what is true about God. His throne. His victory over sin, evil, death. I want to be encouraged and rehearse the truths of Scripture. Sometimes I feel encouraged in this way, but just as often I struggle with the speedy transitions the TV or radio hosts can make from grief to joy. They often bridge that gap faster than I am ready for – it's not a fast transition in my life. And it's especially offensive when your grief or trauma is acute and raw. So when I'm still in shock and I have that numbness that sits in my head throughout my day, hearing reminders to be cheery because Jesus died for me and to be happy in the face of disaster doesn't encourage me because that's not how Christianity works!

Instead of a deep acknowledgement of what is wrong with the world and what is true about God – I hear about putting on a smile on my face and trite words that trivialize the pain that I have seen and that I have experienced. It reminds me of Proverbs 25:20, which says, "Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda."

And I worry people see Christians as a people who don't grieve well because we're too

busy ignoring hard things. That we whitewashed all the grief between the point A of grief to the point B of joy in the face of it all. And it doesn't feel helpful and it isn't healthy when I'm forced to rush through the harder emotions of life so that we're all happy again. Have you ever been forced through grief or harder emotions? It doesn't seem like others are honoring what you're saying about the gravity of a situation and it doesn't feel good. I'm worried people those who hear these Christian radio stations erasing the miles between trauma and joy are implying Jesus always makes everything better instantaneously. I'm worried people are getting the wrong message about Christianity and that it's wrong to be sad! Does the world think Christians don't know how to grieve because we can't handle sadness?

I propose we need a biblical view of emotions where we grieve and can be sad and still know that we are a people formed by God. And as the sheep of his pasture, we recognize the joy and the profound relief that death has lost its poisonous sting. And that the best life is in heaven, face to face with Jesus is still ahead of all of us in heaven. Joy is more robust than just simply being positive or being happy! We need to make sense of the brokenness in the world and the brokenness in our lives if our Gospel proclamation is going to accurately reflect the complexity of the biblical storyline and biblical joy!

The Psalm concludes saying, "For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations." His love endures forever. When my grief, my struggle, my difficulty lasts a week, a month, years – when it doesn't feel like God is good and I begin to doubt that goodness because my situation is so rotten, I need to link arms with people who can limp with me. Lean on someone who can be a companion with you as you continue to come to church and into his presence with as much thanks and praise that you can express. This is what I appreciate about Stephen Ministry, their service is to be available should you need that kind of companion. And if you are on the other side of this coin you have experienced some hard things in life, and have recovered through the grace of God through the Holy Spirit producing good fruit in you in the midst of brokenness. Maybe the next step for you as you have walked faithfully through the pain of grief and loss, maybe you can find ways to be a friend and carry your neighbor to the feet of Jesus. Your recovery can be a channel for redemption that God can use to speak into the lives of others. You can

model how to rely on his steadfast love. We can trust God and rely on his goodness and his steadfast love which endures forever.

Have you ever had a carton of milk go bad? Once it turns, have you ever decided to leave it in the fridge to see if it goes back to being good again? No? Me neither. But I have had bad things happen in my life, and when I look back through the years, I see God's goodness and his faithfulness to use the bad things in my life for his redemptive purposes. He is at work to transform those bad things in my life to have a good effect. And I want to remind you that your grief and your pain, they are not good. But God is going to somehow work good from it. God uses our brokenness in our lives and he redeems it. Your pain is significant and may last a lifetime but it has an expiration date. Your pain will expire. But his steadfast love does not expire. His steadfast love endures forever. Someday your broken heart will be completely restored because his love endures forever. His love outlasts everything that is wrong with this world and you can hold onto that. I can rest in that. That can take hold of us in the middle of suffering. His Spirit is in me now, continuing to form me and grow me and guide me now, despite my circumstances, bringing it to completion at the day of Jesus. He will produce joy inside of us. Don't waste your sufferings by trying to get out of them too quickly. We can continue to enter into his presence and worship with thanksgiving because of the joy that he is building within us.

Conclusion

So the next time you're folding your slacks and you're wondering if Marie Kondo would approve – and you're thinking to yourself, "Do these pants spark joy?" Think about where your true joy comes from. Joy is absolutely essential to what it means to be a Christian. It is essential to the life of faith in this broken world. As a Christian, all the "bad or hard things" in my life will work out for good. All the "good things" that God has given to us cannot be taken away. And the best things are yet to come. This has the power to give us true and biblical joy. And though there may be pain in the night, joy does come in the morning. Joy takes time to fully take root and develop in our lives as a fruit of the Holy Spirit at work in us.

Endnotes:

¹ Marie Kondo, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing* (Penguin Random House: New York, 2014) 66.

² Matthew A. Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotions in the New Testament* (Kregel: Grand Rapids, 2006).

³ Ibid, 166.

⁴ “The Shorter Catechism,” <https://opc.org/documents/SCLayout.pdf>. Accessed July 15, 2019.

⁵ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist Tenth Anniversary Edition* (Multnomah: Oregon, 1996).

⁶ “How Do You Define Joy? Jesus and the Journey to Joy,” John Piper. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-do-you-define-joy>. Accessed July 15, 2019.

⁷ “Christian Happiness,” Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University. <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpb9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy45OjQ6MS53amVv>. Accessed July 15, 2019.

⁸ Timothy Keller, *Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering* (Penguin Group: New York, 2013) 300.