

The Fruit of the Spirit: Joy

Gal 5: 22-26

Heb 12: 1-4

The Fruit of the Spirit, listed in Galatians 5, are aspects of God's character that He desires to grow in us. This week our focus is Joy. God wants us to have more joy! There is joy in the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to each other in self giving love. God wants this same joy to be experienced in our own lives. We want it too but so often it seems to elude us. Or is it that what we think of as joy and what God sees as joy are different?

Jon wanted me to talk on Joy and Peace but for me there is so much I want to say on joy so peace will be for another occasion. As Terry said last week love is the virtue that underpins everything else in the Christian life.

When Jon asked me what other reading I would like I was spoilt for choice. There are getting on to 300 biblical references if you include joy, joyful, enjoy and rejoice. I could have chosen "this is the day that the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it"; "the joy of the Lord is my strength". Or "the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord".

The kingdom of God is a place of joy and the Christian life is meant to be one of joy! Abundant joy! Yet we see so much brokenness, pain and suffering all around us. If our lives are meant to be joyful then why don't we experience more of it.

The bible says "Rejoice in the Lord always". This is from Philipians.

It's often said that Philipians is the happiest of St Paul's letters. But hang on wasn't Paul in prison at the time he wrote this letter?

Writing about joy from prison! It doesn't sound as if it was his circumstances that enabled him to be so happy. So it's possible to have a sense of joy even when things aren't great. Ah yes! Don't we often refer to the Kingdom of God as upside down?

*I think this is the reason I asked Jon for the reading from Hebrews "for the sake of the joy set before Him Jesus endured the cross"? Jesus was about to experience hours of physical agony but worse than that the psychological weight of carrying all of humanity's sin and rebellion against His Father. Jesus was prepared to go through all that because the end goal was worth it. The end goal would be one of joy.

*To my logic this doesn't make sense! There's a mystery here that somehow joy can be experienced in times of pain and loss.

So often when we speak of joy we mean feeling happy, joyful, rejoicing. But feelings, powerful as they can be, are fleeting, feelings come and go. I think it's more about attitude. In the Christian life joy is so much more than seeking pleasure.

Joy is a gift. Joy is attractive. Joy is life in excess and it cannot but help spill over into the lives of others. I want to tell you about a lady I know. I had the privilege of spending time with her before we went to New Wine. In March last year she thought she had flu and within a few days was paralysed and in intensive care on life support. She had been struck down by an autoimmune disease. She was in hospital until December. She doesn't know if

she'll ever walk again. But she is just delightful, so cheerful and thankful for all people do for her and for the progress she has made, albeit very slow. The first thing she said to me was to thank us for all our prayers. She says she has felt lifted up in prayer and she knows it has really helped her cope with her slow recovery. She is amazingly Joyful but she is also grateful. Joy and gratitude go together. But there's another attribute that's relevant here too. Its vulnerability. This dear lady is so vulnerable in her helpless state but there is a sense of joy about her even though there is nothing happy about her situation. Jesus, the all powerful Son of God, allowed himself to be totally vulnerable too, as a human baby and in his passion, not defending himself just allowing those awful events to occur. The agony He suffered was real but he endured it "for the joy set before Him".

*Joy also shines out of little children. Peek a boo, with a 1 year old, being pushed on a swing, a little pot of bubbles, simple things are able to bring such delight to little children. Why do we seem to lose the ability to gain joy from simple things as we get older? Sadly we also seem to have the ability to "kill joy" in ourselves and in others.

We've said joy is a gift. It's a gift we want but we are complex creatures and sometimes it's as if we refuse to accept the gift. We can close ourselves to joy and we can also stop it in others. I used to do a lot of dress making when I was younger. I remember a time I had spent hours making a dress to wear at my sister's wedding. I adjusted it, got the fit right, tried it on and someone dear to me said "the colour doesn't suit you!" Well that was it; my joy just disappeared. I'm sure I have unwittingly done the same to others many times. The damage a few thoughtless words can do. Please remember we can also add to others joy by a few words of encouragement.

Other joy killers. Feeling we don't deserve to be joyful. Thinking we have to earn joy. Taking on too much responsibility, being overly busy; emphasising duty can kill joy. Another one is catastrophizing, we panic, our imagination inflates our problems and they feel overwhelming. If any of these ring true please pray about it. One of the speakers at New Wine talked about our battle being in our minds. I believe this is true. When we choose to follow Jesus our hearts become His but the enemy can still put thoughts in our minds that throw us off course, make us anxious and steal our joy.

To close let's return to our reading from Hebrews. I believe here is where we will find the secret to experiencing more joy in our lives. Ultimately our joy and Jesus joy are the same. Second sentence of chap 12 " And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of Faith. For the Joy that was set before him he endured the cross..."

The joy for Jesus was YOU! You are worth it! He loves you so much He would go to any lengths to secure a way for you to be with Him and His Father in perfect joy. He did this on the cross and His resurrection proves that this has happened.

*This is joy!

We grow in joy by **fixing our eyes on Jesus**

To slightly alter a famous quote

" look at the world and you'll be distressed

Look at yourself and you'll be depressed

Look at Jesus and you'll gain all the rest" Including joy! Amen

