

The Fruit of The Spirit is JOY!  
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How many of you have children around in your life somewhere? Kids, grandkids, nieces, nephews, cousins? Whatever...  
We don't have children in our family right now and I kind of miss it...

Have you ever noticed that children don't worry about most of the stuff we do  
Children live in the present...they take one day at a time...one moment at a time  
And they have an implicit trust that they will be cared for by someone who loves them...  
that's why they are easily joyful...

And I firmly believe that the extent to which we trust God  
Lean into him...depend on him...and live in the moment  
Is the extent to which we will experience joy....

Today we are talking about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Fruit of the Spirit which is JOY...And its going to be an orange this morning cause oranges are cheerful looking fruit...I've asked Jesse Mita to put the joy fruit on the tree this morning...

**TRUST & JOY go hand in hand**  
**Trust stomps out worry and anxiety**  
**And allows us to live in the present....with joyful freedom**

Let's read the words from Psalm (118 ) together and put the emphasis, if you will, on the first word...

***"This is the day that the Lord has made***  
**We will rejoice and be glad in it."** Psalm 118:24

*This is the day...we can't rejoice in this day if we're guilty or resentful about the past or anxious about the future...*

It doesn't say, "Yesterday was the day that the Lord had made. We will think back about what a good day it used to be." Those were the good old days...some churches get locked into that

And it doesn't say, "Tomorrow is the day that the Lord will make. We'll be glad in the future once tomorrow comes."

It's this day...

Right now...today...that is a gift to you...given to you to rejoice in...January 15, 2017!

**The greatest day of your life is right now because this is the only day you've got!**

There are people who spend their whole lives  
Wishing that they could undo something that was done...if you live in the past you will lose your joy...guaranteed

And there are people who spend their whole lives anxious about the future; waiting for what they think might happen in the time to come...if you live there you will lose your joy...guaranteed

This day, right now is the only day you have...That's how children live...they live now...in the present...and there's something very catching about the joy they have because they are able to do this so naturally... its like a breath of fresh air...sort of comes through this video...if you can watch this video without cracking a smile you've got to take an emergency joy pill....it means you are in desperate shape

**(SHOW VIDEO – Laughing Baby Ethan on Youtube – play from start to 1:18)**

Who thought up laughter...and created this whole joy factor in life?  
What is it that keeps us from enjoying life a little bit more...laughing a little longer... pausing a few more times during the day to fully appreciate things...

To embrace this joy factor...that was given and created by God?

A study showed that today families do three things much less often than they used to...

1. tell stories 2. sing together 3. laugh together

People are too rushed, too preoccupied, too anxious to do those things much anymore the study showed.

AND YET...

This is the day that the Lord has made... don't miss it...this is your moment for joyful living...you are breathing, your heart is pumping, you are thinking and feeling and seeing You are alive...

Rejoice, and be glad in it God tells you... this moment of life is a gift for you...given by me

I was talking to Stacy Tong and he told me he is very busy these days because so many people have the flu.

How many of you have had the flu virus in past weeks?

With all the cold air, wind and rain it makes sense.

But you know the Flu is not the only virus plaguing us these days

Our culture suffers from another virus...

Its called the "**The Taking It For Granted Virus**"...the symptoms are dullness, boredom, chronic dissatisfaction, and restlessness,

Every day the sun comes up...and we just sort of take it for granted (and actually you don't have an excuse here like they do in NJ where I am from cause hereyou can actually see the sun.)

I take for granted that my heart beats, that my eyes see, that I can think and feel and engage in activities and relationships that bring me fulfillment

And then there are those other things like flowers, and mountain ranges, and Grand Canyons and sunrises and sunsets, and pelicans and beaches and rainbows and music and cuts that heal on their own and we say....*OK...been there...done that...ho hum... yawn...*

*What's new? Get me a promotion, a remodel on the house, a new car.*

I heard a story from a colleague recently about a guy whose name was Chuck...Chuck got cancer and had to go through chemo treatments...became emaciated and so sick he had to go to the ER several times. But he made it through the treatments and it was a huge accomplishment and a victory day. And then one month later he went in for his post-treatment test. It was then he found out that the markers were as high as they were before he started treatment. This he knew was a death sentence. Nothing good had come out of all that agony. He was going to die. It was a Thursday.

Friday morning the lab called. Someone had made a mistake and given him the results of someone else's test. Chuck was going to live. He was fine. He was well. Do you think he took that day for granted? No. It had never been so clear to him in that moment what a gift life was. Did he want the lab to fire the guy that gave him the wrong results? The lab asked him. No, he said, he wanted to hug him.....

***This*** is the day...given to us by God...let us rejoice and be glad in it! Don't miss out...its right here...don't take it for granted...its God's gift to you...

When I was trying to choose the scriptures for this morning I went to the online concordance and was astounded at the number of times joy appears in scripture...I didn't have time to count them all but there were a lot – we had 3 scriptures today – so many!!

And...

I was thinking about how interesting it is that joy is number two on the list of the fruit of the Spirit....

For some reason it made sense that love would be first

But joy second....that is a little surprising...

Maybe its because I grew up with a lot of joy-less Christians

Who wore dour expressions on their faces...who talked a lot about what we couldn't do...and how bad we were

And who knew a lot about the Bible and were quoting it all the time; except evidently not the parts about joy, because they were far less joyful than everyone else...and they never smiled

Do you know it takes less muscles in your face to smile than it does to frown...

So preserve energy...smile...rejoice...be glad in this day...and have more energy at the end of it

So because I had examples of joyless Christians in my life...

It was only much later that I realized in a whole new way what a joyful being God is....

When you abide in God...when you lean into him

You can't help but become joy-filled because God is full of joy.

John Ortberg writes,

***“Joy is at the heart of who God is , and we will never understand the significance of Joy in human life until we understand its importance to God!”***

The late Dallas Willard writes,

***“You’ll not understand God until you understand this about Him God is the happiest being in the universe.”***

Lewis Smedes writes,

***“To miss out on joy is to miss out on the reason for your existence.”***

C.S. Lewis put it like this:

***“Joy is the serious business of heaven.”***

From the good old creeds of the Presbyterian Church we learn that

***“The chief end of human beings is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever”***

And St. Paul writes this,

***“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say it...rejoice.” Philippians 4:4***

Without joy, spiritual life becomes drudgery and exhausting.

Ministry becomes defeating...and I begin to take myself way too seriously

Did you notice in the video of that little kid laughing how the adult kept making the same sound over and over again...and how it just delighted the child and threw him into a fit of laughter?

It reminded me of one other quote, this one from GK Chesterton, one of my favorite Christians of all time, who was known for his wit, brilliance and sense of humor, as well as his Christian apologetics...He writes,

***“Because children have a bounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, “Do it again.” And the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead, for grown up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony.***

***But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again!” to the sun, and every evening, “Do it again!” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike. It may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them....It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy, for we have sinned and grown old...and our Father is younger than we.”***

Don't you just love that last line? We have sinned and grown old...with worry, anxiety, and self-preoccupation and ....and our Father is younger than we are....

That's the God of joy whom we worship.

That's the God of all creation who didn't wake up one morning and decide to create the world because he had to....

Out of a sense of duty and obligation

He didn't say...oh brother...what a bore...I'd like to create some planets maybe, perhaps a few stars, but I really can't muster the energy and since I don't have to do it, I just won't.

I'm going to make everything flat and functional and gray.

And **At the end of the week God was burnt out and said "Thank me...its Friday."**

No...there's this joyful refrain throughout the book of Genesis..."**And God saw that it was good!**" and God created this and that and the other thing...not things that were all functional and necessary...but creatures, and beauty, and light...God put in the extras...the color, the vistas, and the relationships....and it was good...it was very good....the joy of this loving being who created the world just bubbles up from the pages of Genesis...

Now I know what some of you may be thinking - you are thinking hey...there is pain in the world; and it is hard to embrace joy when there is so much that is wrong....How can I embrace joy in the midst of injustice?

And I get that...

But I think that one of the tests of true authentic joy is its ability to exist alongside of suffering;

People who lived with Mother Teresa said that in the middle of all that suffering, what was remarkable about her was not the way that she kept serving but it was the extraordinary capacity in which she brought joy.

That is what distinguishes joy from cheap circumstantial shallow pleasure.

Joy is deeper...

It is a fierce declaration that says that no matter what I see with my eyes...I know God is bigger than the pain of it, the injustice, and that one day there will be no more tears, or crying or pain anymore...

**As Karl Barth said,  
"Joy is a defiant "Nevertheless!"**

*In the face of pain...because I know that Jesus has overcome the world...I will rejoice...even though I don't see the completion of that yet...*

The most joyful book in the NT is the book of Philippians

Read it some time – we studied it here at WVPC once

It was written by Paul, who is under arrest waiting to be executed

It is here that Paul writes the words we had up on the screens a moment before that said "Rejoice in the Lord always...again I say rejoice."

This command had nothing to do with Paul's circumstances

It has everything to do with knowing who God is – the most joyful being in the universe - and letting that "Nevertheless" joy define him...

I want you to take a minute right now and ask yourself

**What is my joy balance?**

Am I trusting God? Do I need to put some baggage down so I can ease up a little bit and learn to embrace joy?

You know we check the balance in our checking account all the time...

But when it comes to joy, we don't often ask ourselves how we're faring...

If your balance on the joy factor is low today then ask yourself something else...

What steals my joy? What keeps me from really entering into the freedom that my faith offers me...the delight of knowing my sins are forgiven in Jesus name?

What keeps me from dancing in my spirit, from playing easily, from being filled with wonder at life's beauty?...What keeps me from laughing a little bit more, from enjoying God's gift of this day, and letting Holy Spirit joy be my joy?

If its hurry....ruthlessly simplify your life so you can slow down

If its lack of forgiveness or guilt... from the past...don't give those things the power to steal away your life...ruthlessly work on letting them go...and putting them at the foot of the cross...so you can experience the joy of your salvation. Jesus will take whatever you give him.

If its anxiety about the future...ruthlessly decide to trust God who promised he would meet all of your needs...instead of fearing the evil one.

If its physical sickness that's dragging you down, (hard), or hurts or wounds from the past, I encourage you to come up here for prayer after the service...healing service is next week...and then it may be time for you to decide that you are going to do a defiant "**Nevertheless**" as Barth put it..."I will rejoice cause God is bigger than my illness, and my wounds, and ultimately victorious."

Every Christian is heaven bound folks. The best is yet to come when this life is over.

So even death is not enough to steal our joy in Christ. Jesus' resurrection was a defiant **NEVERTHELESS** in the face of death.

Did you hear about the woman who was dying who asked to be buried with a fork in her hand. This woman who was always known for her joyful outlook on life said "*I want to be buried with a fork in my hand, because the fork is the last utensil left on the table – Why? It means the desert is coming. And I want people to look at me and remember that the best is yet to come.*"

Friends, the fruit of the Holy Spirit is JOY...Check your joy balance today and ruthlessly eliminate anything that steals that away from you. God is the most joyful being in the universe and his spirit lives in you...

To close lets read responsively what is up on the screens:

**L: Rejoice in the Lord always.**

**P: I will say it again: Rejoice!**

**L: This is the day that the Lord has made**

**P: Let us rejoice and be glad in it! AMEN!**