

“The Secret of Happiness - Celebration”

Scripture: Philippians 4

Graphics: smiley face, party, balloons

Big Truth: The secret to happiness seems to be something that we desire and even chase after, but often don't experience. Life circumstances, family relationships, work, school, and many other things rob us of our joy, which affects our happiness. The Apostle Paul had every reason to be unhappy, but he was filled with joy because of the people who loved him, partnered with him, and were growing in Christ. Paul gave us a formula for the secrets to happiness - gratitude, humility, death, and celebration.

Focus Phrase: Today is a day to celebrate!

1. Introduction

A. Today is a great day! Today is a day to celebrate!

- i. First, as of this week, we are a Global Methodist Church! And our mission is to **make disciples of Jesus Christ who worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly.**
- ii. This has been a long road. It was sometimes challenging, and because we've never been here before, we weren't always sure what we were doing.
- iii. However, I know two things:
 - a. #1 - **We have a faithful God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - who has guided, prodded, prompted, and sustained us through this whole process of disaffiliation and affiliation with the Global Methodist Church. We answered the call to remain faithful to our orthodox Wesleyan Methodist heritage and the Word of God. For that, I'm thankful. And...
 - b. #2 - **We have an incredible team** of servants who have spent countless hours on every aspect of God's new direction for us - from finances, to legal matters, to membership, and discipleship. I'd like our Discernment Team stand where they are so we can celebrate them and their gifts!
Thank you!
- iv. This truly IS a day to celebrate all that God is doing in our midst and preparing us for the future! God is SO good! Amen?

B. When we think about celebrations - birthday parties, family holidays, retirement parties, weddings - we can't help but associate celebration with happiness, even if every aspect of those isn't perfect, right?

C. At our wedding, Stacy and I had an incredible time of celebration! We had friends around us from all over the place. We danced and danced! And we had our family all there. That may have been more challenging than we would've liked, since one family liked to play practical jokes and the other didn't. There may have been words exchanged, and possibly some people getting in

each others' faces. Thankfully, none of that could ruin the fact that we were married and, now 30+ years later, are still celebrating being married.

- D. Celebrations are wonderful! And we can celebrate all that God is doing, in SPITE of the fact that not everything is perfect in this life.
- E. We celebrate all that God is doing, while God is still working out His Kingdom on earth AND ALSO while you and I work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, as we read in Philippians chapter 2.
- F. SO, not only is TODAY a day to celebrate, but EVERY DAY as a follower of Jesus is a day to celebrate God and all He is doing. And when we let the joy of Jesus' Good News that's in our hearts be expressed on our faces, and in our lives, we are filled with happiness because of Jesus. THAT is a reason to celebrate!
- G. This morning, we're going to go back to Philippians to finish up this letter Paul wrote to them from a nasty Roman prison. Paul was celebrating all that God was doing in that little church, even though Paul's circumstances were pretty brutal...and even though things weren't perfect in the church, as we'll see. Yet...he still celebrated and had joy because of Jesus and his mission.
- H. Let's pray and then we'll dive in this morning...
- I. **PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**
- J. Open your Bibles to Philippians 4...starting in verse 1...

2. Scripture

A. READ Philippians 4:1-9

- B. Life wasn't perfect for Paul or the Philippians church. Yet, Paul was celebrating what he was seeing in them. He was genuinely happy to be writing this letter to the church, celebrating their ministry!
 - i. He called them his "joy and crown"...and encouraging them to stand firm.
 - ii. Even though he was seeing some disagreements among them, he was celebrating the fact that the church could come along side two women and help them be of one mind. We don't know what the disagreement was Euodia and Syntyche, but Paul was confident that they would reconcile with the help of the church. Loving extravagantly.
 - iii. He rejoiced and encouraged the church to rejoice in the Lord. Worship passionately. When they were rejoicing in the Lord, it would send a powerful signal to the world around them that they were filled with joy and happiness and gentleness for all those around them and all that God was doing in their midst. Witnessing boldly!

- iv. He encouraged them not to worry about ANYTHING, but pray together. The church that prays together for God to meet their needs, even through difficult times, brings God's peace amongst them.
 - v. Paul encouraged the church to think about and to grow in all things that are honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise...and to keep doing the ministry and outreach that grew from those thing.
- C. As I think about the past couple years, and our journey into the Global Methodist Church, life has NOT been perfect, but God has been with us!
- i. We've taken a clear stand on the foundation of the first 2,000 years of Christian faith and confidence in the Word of God.
 - ii. We've paid a price, in more ways than one. But God has provided.
 - iii. We've grieved and cried, worried and wondered. We have blessed people as they made their way to other churches, sometimes tearfully, as God led them to a new place for many good reasons.
 - iv. We've had things said about us that are not true and that sow discouragement in our hearts and sometimes in the community.
 - v. So, how can we celebrate today?
 - vi. Well, let Paul's words sink deeply into us:
 - a. We're helping each other get along and grow in the faith handed down from the apostles.
 - b. We have joy because our faith in God through this process is a witness to our gentleness to the church, the community and the world. We are not who some people say we are. And the only way to prove that is to worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly, as we keep gently and humbly serving everyone we can, for God's glory.
 - c. We are trusting in God's provision and will not worry about the future, but spend time in prayer together...allowing the peace of God to invade every ministry and heart.
 - d. We are pursuing all the things that are honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise. And when we aren't, we are praying that God would close doors He doesn't want us to walk through and open doors He does!
 - e. We're not perfect, but as we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, keep us humble, pour out his grace and mercy on us, and if we offer ourselves to His calling, we can (WE WILL) celebrate!
- D. Today is a good day to celebrate EVERYTHING God has done, is doing, and will do in our midst.

3. Application

- A. You can go back to Philippians and read Paul's final thanks and praise for the church in Philippi. But as a way of opening the door for us to our celebration today here and after worship, I wanted to remind us where we've come from.
- B. History is important because if we get so caught up in what's happening now, or in our lifetime, we tend to forget the faithfulness of God throughout history.
- C. I want to specifically focus in on the history of THIS community of faith. This church. It's a fascinating history and tells a story of 200 years of faithful saints gathered on this holy ground. It's very fitting on this All Saints Sunday, for us to honor the work of God in this place over the past 200 years.
 - i. The year was 1824. A man named Moses C. Marsh of Massachusetts relocated to this village, built the first store and first frame house and the village was called Panama, NY.
 - ii. In 1826, the first Methodist Society at Panama was organized by Rev. Peter D. Horton. He was a circuit riding preacher, who came to Panama once every three weeks and served over 600 people throughout the County in various villages.
 - iii. The first Methodist Society in Panama had 6 members: the Cranes, the Sweets, and the Paddocks, three married couples.
 - iv. Throughout the early years, many circuit riders served Panama and the area on horseback, many who died young due to the harsh conditions, lack of pay, and long hours.
 - v. By 1834, the Panama charge was part of the Youngsville, PA circuit. The minister that year was David Preston. David's wife and son are buried in the Panama Union Cemetery. See if you can find their graves.
 - vi. In 1839, the first church building was erected on this site. A white wooden building with pews and natural wood paneling. There was one wood stove to heat the church. There were stables out back for horses and a well for water. The pastor that year got paid \$159, mostly to cover his expenses.
 - vii. By 1883, the church in Panama was growing with the village, and a new parsonage was built. Since that year (fun fact) the pastor of the Panama Methodist Church has occupied that parsonage.
 - viii. In 1909, visionary Pastor Amos Lockwood held a revival and preached a sermon in which he said this, "Standing on an ocean shore, one might see a speck - a distant sail on the horizon. It is there and then shortly passes from sight. We appear on the horizon of time - a speck in God's infinity of duration; we vanish from the scene - out into his eternity. Thus we see our need to use our time preparing for eternity."

- ix. In 1928, the original wood church building was razed and the cornerstone of the new church building, a red brick structure ordered from a catalogue of churches and still standing today, was laid on July 15, 1928. The new church was dedicated on December 30, 1929 and the building cost \$21,500.
 - x. In 1939, the Panama Methodist Episcopal Church became the Panama Methodist Church, after the merger of three denominations.
 - xi. The original Fellowship Hall was built in 1957-58, so that the growing church could gather together for meals and celebrations!
 - xii. In 1968, the name changed once again to Panama United Methodist Church, due to another merger between the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church.
 - xiii. The rest of the history is more recent.
 - a. In 2010, a young preacher and his family came to Panama from Little Valley - the third Pastor Steve in a row, now 30+ years of Pastor Steves.
 - b. In 2019, a brand new Community Room, Gallery, and Children's Ministry area was constructed at a cost of nearly \$1.9M, and the previous Fellowship Hall was demolished, along with a house that the church purchased to make room for the new addition.
 - c. And, finally, in November 2023, after a year of discernment and prayer, the Panama United Methodist Church officially became part of the new and exciting Global Methodist Church, and regained the name Panama Methodist Church.
 - xiv. Church, the line from the first Methodist Society in Panama in 1826 to today has not been a straight line, nor has it ever been easy. There have been struggles, trials, fires, tense meetings, people coming and people going, and building campaigns. Pastors have come and go - more than 100 in that span. We are yet "a speck in God's infinity of duration..." as Pastor Lockwood said in 1909.
 - xv. **Yet, we have Jesus.** And in the grand scheme of the past, present, and future of the people called Methodists in Panama and around the globe, having Jesus at the center of all we do is the main (the ONLY) thing.
 - xvi. We have had and will have disagreements. We're human. We will do our best to love each other and love our neighbors extravagantly. We will serve in ministries of justice and mercy. We will preach the word, engage in discipleship, and go out in mission and outreach. **But JESUS and His Word will always be at the center of all we do.**
- D. Paul said to the Philippians church: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say Rejoice!"

- E. We celebrate today not because we're proud of what we've done throughout the history of the church. We don't celebrate because we've had good leaders and faithful congregations. We don't celebrate because there've been generous givers and humble servants. All that is great!
- F. We celebrate today because from the first day someone said, "Let's start a church here..." until today, the Triune God and the Word of God have been the compass and the Northstar that have guided every decision and every worship service and every mission.
- G. But even more, we celebrate today because God has done the work of salvation and changed the lives of thousands of people right here on this spot, for eternity. Maybe you're one of them. I know that every one of us has been impacted by the faithful witness of those who have gone before us, and those who are sitting with us today. We get to be that for those who come after us.
- H. In 2026, this church will celebrate 200 years of faithful ministry in this community and region. I pray that when we celebrate THAT, we will remember every faithful thing God has done to provide for every need and every life that has been saved by grace through faith in a loving God who gave it all for us.
- I. God celebrates THAT...and every person who comes to faith in Jesus through His word and His people. Praise be to God! We celebrate that!

4. Conclusion

- A. Every car has a rearview mirror and a windshield. If you think about the size of the windshield compared to the size of the rearview mirror, we learn a valuable lesson. When you're on a journey, the difference in size of those two pieces of glass teaches us that we should be looking ahead through the windshield far more than we should be looking behind us in the mirror. It's important to sometimes look behind us so that we remember where we've been and be thankful.
- B. But, God is calling us to look forward to what lies ahead...to honor what has been our journey behind us, and to press on toward new ministries, new people, new opportunities to share the Good News and grow!
- C. Today is a day to celebrate! Celebration is the final secret to happiness, because the joy of Jesus in us - for all he's done - wells up and explodes onto our faces as smiles and even tears.
- D. Church, it's time to celebrate! To make church fun again! To press ahead knowing that the best is yet to come, and God's not done with us yet!
- E. Let's celebrate!
 - i. Celebrate our new denomination.

- ii. Celebrate our renewed call to make disciples who worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly.
 - iii. Celebrate our history and our present.
 - iv. Celebrate God's faithfulness and our fellow disciples on the road with us.
 - v. Celebrate our gratitude, humility, promised death and resurrection.
 - vi. Celebrate life and Jesus and every act of worship, discipleship, and mission.
- F. It's time! Let's go!
- G. Let's pray...then we have a special guest via video.
- H. PRAY!**