

“Joy in Christ” (topical)

For Your Life in Christ the Third Wednesday Service in Advent

December 14th, 2011

Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LC-MS)

Rev. Dr. Alfonso O. Espinosa

Introduction: Joy Can Really Seem To Be Elusive At Times!

- A. Being active in ministry, kind of like just being active in life, means that we encounter so many things in this world and life that most certainly *do not* bring joy.
- B. This is why the season leading up to Christmas and Christmas itself can be so challenging! One of my favorite Christmas carols and perhaps one of yours as well is “Joy to the World!”
- C. I felt terribly self-conscious during the Christmas caroling last week because I sang that first “Joy!” so loudly at one of the retirement homes that I *scared* one of the residents! I felt and feel badly for doing so because “joy” and “fear” don’t mix!
- D. But these strange combinations that we call “paradoxes” often confront us do they not? Right in the middle of this season of joy, people fight depression, mourn deeply at the loss of loved ones, literally live in fear for all kinds of reasons; struggle on account of illness, or loneliness, or financial crisis. These things fill us with anxiety, worry, and sometimes even despair and misery. Not exactly the themes of joy.
- E. There is no denying it, so much in life just fights against our experiencing joy. I bring this out because I think even while we might have a hard time admitting it, this real experience makes us suspect that perhaps we are just defective...that ***if you are struggling, then you have no right, or capacity for joy. Joy must be for you something that is just off limits.***
- F. And when we buy into this idea, we buy into a lie. It isn’t true.

Part I: It’s Not As Much About What Happens In Life, As It Is About Who Holds Your Life No Matter What Happens!

- A. So I did a word study in the Greek New Testament for the family of English words that we use to translate Scripture with words like “exultation, gladness, joy, cheerfulness, delight, a good frame of mind, be merry, and rejoice.”

-2-

- B. It is absolutely amazing to note that some of the Greek words used in a good way were profanely secular in their original use. And yet ***God’s Word changes the focus of these words!***
- C. So you wind-up with paradoxical situations. For example:
Matthew 5:12: “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
 1. A Christian may be in the middle of persecution and yet the Lord says “rejoice and be glad.” Now there’s a paradox ***and so much for the theory that joy is off limits!***
 2. But how do we understand joy and suffering going hand-in-hand? It is understood when you see that your life is bound to Jesus’ life. As His life went, your life goes. I’ve lost count of how many Christians have suffered for “doing the right thing,” a friend of mine used to use the expression that “no good deed goes unpunished.” If you ever feel that way, then rejoice ***not for suffering (that would be sick), but rejoice in how God directs you in the midst of it...namely, causing you to run to Christ.***
 3. ***And if you run to Him, then brace yourself...check out:***

Romans 8:18: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Part II: This Shouldn’t Surprise Us Because Jesus Showed Us What He Did When Faced With The Cross:

- A. His view of the cross was not to be crushed or to sink in fear.
- B. Instead He “despised” it and divested the shame of its power.
Hebrews 12:2b: “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.”
- C. His joy was found in what came ***through*** the cross. All of the bad stuff was worth it because He was overjoyed to save you from sin, to save you from death, and to save you for God! He was joyful that you would be together with God forever! And as we look forward to that, we too see through the bad stuff, and as we do we see Christ, and to see Christ is to know joy!