

“Embracing Joy: A Leap of Faith”  
Philippians 4:4-7

As we consider the theme of joy on this Holy Humor Sunday, our hearts turn to the powerful words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians 4:4-7

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made<sup>1</sup> known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

These words, on the surface, might strike us as a beautiful but perhaps unrealistic ideal. How can we *always* rejoice? Life, as we know it, is often filled with challenges, uncertainties, and even suffering.

Recently, I was reflecting on the resilience of faith, and I came across a video (perhaps you saw it too) of Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem celebrating Jesus’ triumphant entry into that holy city on Palm Sunday. The air was alive with joy, music, and laughter. It was a powerful display, especially when we consider the difficult circumstances under which these brothers and sisters in Christ live. How can such profound joy exist amidst oppression?

Their secret, I believe, echoes the very message Paul offers us: a joy deeply rooted in God’s unwavering love, a love that transcends the logic of this world. They embody the spirit of Philippians 4:4-7.

To us, living in our own contexts, Paul’s command to “rejoice always” might feel like an impossibility. Yet, understanding the context of these words offers us a deeper perspective. Paul penned this letter not from a place of comfort and ease, but from a prison cell. The Philippian church itself was a small and perhaps struggling community, facing a dominant and often hostile culture, internal tensions, and external opposition.

And yet, in the midst of this, Paul’s voice rings out with unwavering conviction: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice!” He repeats this theme of joy throughout his letter. How could he proclaim such hope and faith in the face of such adversity?

Paul’s life was one lived in constant communion with God through prayer and the Holy Spirit. When his heart was open to the presence of God, he experienced a profound joy that permeated his entire being. His life became a living prayer. Following the way of Jesus didn’t shield Paul from hardship; in fact, it often led to greater difficulty. Yet, his deep faith allowed him to see beyond his immediate circumstances, to view life through the lens of eternity. His prescription for

navigating life's challenges was to remain connected to the very source of his joy – God. We see this exemplified in Acts 16, where Paul and Silas, even while imprisoned, prayed and sang hymns to God.

The key to grasping Paul's message lies in the phrase "Rejoice *in the Lord* always." This isn't about a superficial happiness dependent on favorable conditions. It's a deep, abiding joy that finds its source and sustenance in our relationship with God, in our connection to one another in the body of Christ, in an awareness of our own spiritual core, and even in the wonder of God's creation.

So, what does this kind of rejoicing look like in our lives? We can glean insights from Paul's own practices:

1. **Singing Songs of Faith:** Even in confinement, Paul found solace and strength in singing praises to God. Cynthia Bourgeault reminds us of the power of chanting in sacred traditions, noting how it can awaken our emotional center and attune us to the frequency of love and adoration. Whether our voices are strong or soft, the act of lifting them in song connects us to the breath of life itself, a gift from the Divine. Singing, without pretense, allows the unique beauty of our aliveness to shine through.
2. **Praying and Connecting:** Paul maintained deep connections – with God through prayer, with himself through self-awareness, and with others through fellowship, letter writing, sharing the Gospel, working for justice and peace, and serving the church. He understood his own weaknesses but also the depth of his soul. Spending time in God's presence and with God's people nurtured his spirit.
3. **Sharing Our Stories:** Paul was unafraid to share his whole story – the triumphs and the failures, the joys and the sorrows. He embraced vulnerability, recognizing that even his pain and imperfections could become opportunities to witness God's grace at work in his life.

The wisdom of finding joy amidst life's complexities isn't unique to one religious tradition. In their insightful book, *The Book of Joy*, the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, two individuals who have faced immense personal and societal challenges, offer their own reflections on the path to joy. Their lessons resonate deeply with Paul's message:

1. **Positive Outlook and Gratitude:** Recognizing suffering but choosing to focus on the good, cultivating gratitude even in difficult times.
2. **Forgiveness:** Releasing negativity by forgiving ourselves and others.

3. **Compassion:** Extending understanding and empathy to ourselves and all of humanity.
4. **Humility:** Acknowledging our limitations and learning from our mistakes.
5. **Humor and Laughter:** Finding lightness and resilience through the ability to laugh.
6. **Interconnectedness:** Recognizing our shared humanity and fostering a sense of responsibility towards one another.
7. **Acts of Kindness and Generosity:** Experiencing fulfillment through giving and service.

Rejoicing, in this context, is an active orientation of our lives towards the things of God. We begin to see the divine presence in all aspects of creation, finding sources of connection and joy in the everyday. When we experience God's presence, we are often filled with a sense of awe and wonder, a shift in perspective where even familiar circumstances feel new. Though the external world may remain the same, we are transformed by the touch of God's love, experiencing a lightness and joy that surpasses earthly understanding.

Today, I invite you to take a leap of faith into this profound joy. Embrace Paul's exhortation: "Rejoice in the Lord always." Consider what practices help you connect with God. Perhaps it's setting aside more time for prayer, engaging more deeply in scripture, spending time in nature, connecting with fellow believers, or finding your voice in song. Maybe it's about sharing your story with authenticity, embracing your vulnerabilities as opportunities for God's grace to shine.

Take that leap of faith into joy. Your life doesn't need to be perfect for you to experience it. Your attempts may not always feel successful, but trust that, over time, by continually turning towards God, you will discover a deeper, more abiding joy that sustains you each day.

Here is a lighthearted video of penguins jumping into the water for the first time. It is a great metaphor for taking that leap, trusting even when the outcome is uncertain:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/18e8c72kJN/>

Just as those penguins bravely leap into the unknown, may we too, with faith and courage, take that leap into the joy that is found in the Lord.

Amen.



- 5 Ben Ceglia
- 9 Jennifer Rowe
- 11 Melinda Hay
- 12 William Cox
- 13 Eleanor Hicks
- 14 Sheryl Maier  
Pam Pedro
- 17 Steven Petty
- 19 Jason Rowe
- 22 Blakely Harris
- 29 Paul Kern  
Stella Raymond
- 30 Zachery Gilebarto