**“Joy That Lasts” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Easter 5 – May 18, 2025**

1. **John 16:22** - 22So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.
2. **What brings you joy**?
   1. I suppose everyone’s answer is a little different…
      1. Music, movies, art, creativity that we express or experience.
      2. Getting projects done, gardening, crafting, or fixing things.
      3. Traveling, eating at different restaurants, or hiking in nature.
      4. Following favorite sports, gaming, reading, or coffee with friends.
      5. Children, family, teaching, or maybe excelling at work.
      6. All these things might bring us a certain amount of joy, and especially as we understand them through God’s good gifts to us.
   2. One of the greatest joys is when we struggle though a long hardship only to find success on the other end… all the trials prepare us for a victory.
      1. For those of us who follow sports, many teams are perennial losers… or get close to the championship and always seem to fall short.
      2. Some of the Boston Redsox and the Chicago Cubs baseball fans spent their whole lives cheering on teams that could never win the World Series until somewhat recently.
      3. I certainly felt that way about the Denver Broncos after I watched them lose 4 Super Bowls leading up to their first win in 1998.
         1. I joke that watching them win Super Bowl XXXII was the greatest day of my life… and marrying Michele and having children were of course really good too ☺.
         2. All the disappointment and heartache… the dashed hopes… all washed away when they finally won the big game.
   3. There is something strange about joy though, because true joy doesn’t come from our own efforts, but it’s a gift.
      1. It’s interesting but the root word for joy in Greek is also the root word for grace and gift.
      2. The joy that comes from God is a gift that we can’t produce or create on our own… in fact, trying to make ourselves happy is the root of all kinds of problems.
   4. In his book “Surprised by Joy”, C.S. Lewis said something along the lines of joy is deeply fulfilling, but when we aim directly at it… it eludes us.
      1. In other words, when we pursue joy… we lose it.
      2. When our goal is to feel better emotionally, or to be happy rather than sad or anxious… our sinful nature seeks out the very things that destroy our joy.
   5. I recently went to Hood River to attend our monthly pastor meeting, and we listened to a presentation on what young people born after 2000 are experiencing.
      1. Research is showing that the advent of social media – including Instagram, TikTok, and other platforms have caused unbelievable stress and anxiety in our young people.
      2. The constant pressure of putting our lives online for others to judge is unsustainable… and we begin to see our self-worth through the eyes of random strangers rather than God.
         1. Some of us have experienced posting something online and receiving a bunch of likes… and it boosts our mood!
         2. But what happens if we post something and people are negative… we feel bad about ourselves.
   6. It really doesn’t matter what ways we try to feel better, they are temporary fixes for something much deeper…. that cannot be fixed without God.
      1. All our efforts to find joy are fleeting as Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, “No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and [chasing] after wind...” (Eccl. 2:8,11)
      2. If anyone could have made themselves happy by things and experiences it was King Solomon, but we have a never-ending need for more… the next positive comment, the next emotional high, the next paycheck… but it’s all just chasing after the wind.
3. **Jesus knows exactly what we need**.
   1. In our Gospel lesson, He prepares the disciples for the difficulties ahead, as He knows that He will soon die on the cross and rise again.
      1. The disciples are confused because it doesn’t make sense that Jesus won’t see them for a little while and then they will see Him for a little while… but they will understand soon enough.
      2. He tells them that the Holy Spirit will be a huge help as they go forward… and they will need the Spirit when they suffer loss.
      3. Jesus wants them to know that the world will rejoice in His death on the cross, but even though they don’t understand it now, His disciples will rejoice when He rises in victory over death and the grave.
      4. It will be like a mother who goes through a terrible labor and delivery… excruciating pain and suffering… only to give way to pure joy over a new life.
   2. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the greatest comeback story… the best example of hopeless defeat turning into the greatest victory… the most depressing heartbreak that led to overwhelming joy.
      1. No, all the clues that Jesus was giving His followers about the coming events could not have prepared them for the loss they would experience, but all of it was to redeem them… and us too.
   3. We define grace as the undeserved, unearned favor of God… and because we cannot earn it, we always see it as a gift.
      1. As I mentioned before the root word for grace is also gift and joy… and the only true joy we can experience is the eternal joy given through the grace of God and His forgiveness won on the cross.
         1. Jesus Christ was both God (divine) and man (human), which made the sacrifice for our sins enough because only God could pay for all sin… but as a man, Jesus lived without sin to be the one person who was perfect… the perfect sacrifice.
         2. It may seem strange that the gift of grace and joy would come through such terrible suffering, but payment of death was required for our freedom.
   4. Now, our victory is tied directly to the death and resurrection of Jesus… because without Him and the gift of our faith in Him, we lose… we die with no hope… we are unforgiven and separated from God forever.
      1. In those places you feel a lack of joy or contentment, stop for a moment and remember your Baptism.
         1. Martin Luther once wrote – “We must humbly admit, ‘I know full well that I cannot do a single thing that is pure. But I am baptized, and through my baptism God, who cannot lie, has bound Himself in a covenant with me. He will not count my sin against me but will slay it and blot it out.’”1
         2. When the sin in me pursues joy and becomes nothing more than giving in to temptations and brokenness, we repent of our sins and announce boldly, “I am baptized! I am God’s child, and I am forgiven.”
4. **True joy that lasts is a gift from God**.
   1. Remember the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5?
      1. It says that by the power of the Holy Spirit we will have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control… and then it says, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Gal. 5:22-24)
      2. We are free from the pursuit of joy to help ourselves get through life… and instead it is given to us by the power of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to give after He ascended into heaven.
      3. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we have a greater self-control that guides us away from the traps of seeking approval, discontentment, chasing after the wind, and filling the empty spots with evil and calling it good.
   2. “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil. 4:4) because your joy does not depend on how well life is going or how you feel today…. It rests in the definite promise of Christ, who died and rose again to make you His own.
      1. In Baptism, the Holy Spirit has sealed you with the gift of God’s grace and filled you with a joy the world cannot give… or take away!
      2. So we rejoice, not in our circumstances, but in our Savior—because in Him, our joy is secure forever.

1 Luther, M. (1999). *Luther’s works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.; Vol. 35, p. 36). Fortress Press.