

December 16, 2018  
Sermon for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent  
St Peter Lutheran Church  
Bowie, TX  
Larry Knobloch, Pastor  
Philippians 4:4-7

*J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus*

Philippians 4:4–7 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Grace, Mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen

The Third Sunday in Advent is traditionally known as “Rejoice or Joy” Sunday. Or in Latin “Gaudete” Sunday. Most churches will use blue or purple candles for their Advent wreath for each Sunday in Advent except this Sunday, when a lighter—usually pink or rose—candle is used.

As we see the lighted candles progress around the Advent wreath, we see that the day is getting nearer. Children are becoming more excited as Christmas draws ever closer. One of the Christmas traditions that we observe in our home is to watch the Muppet Christmas Carol in which they sing a song that talks about there only being one more sleep ‘til Christmas. Some parents count those ‘sleeps’ with almost as much anticipation as their children do...Others dread that day.

People without families anticipate another lonely Christmas. Fathers and mothers who are unemployed are disappointed they can’t buy better gifts for their children, or maybe even any gifts at all. Still others, because of a death in the family, are spending their first Christmas without their loved one.

So what’s to be so excited about?

Well, even in this season when it’s so easy to become distracted, disturbed, and depressed, our heavenly Father gives us the Reason to rejoice.

Whether we find ourselves in poverty or wealth, solid families or broken ones, for us as Christians, the reason for our rejoicing is not to be found in our circumstances. Rather, it is to be found in the gracious heart of God. He sent His Son to live, suffer, and die for us so that we might be reconciled to God.

So many people think they need to find their own reason to rejoice. We hear about pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps, even though most don’t even know what

bootstraps are anymore. We encourage each other to see the bright points, to buck up, or to put it more crudely, to suck it up! There are lots of good things to be happy about in this world, don't worry, be happy. Comedian and actor Robin Williams was known to enjoy Bobby McFerrin's hit song from 1988, "Don't Worry, Be Happy", yet Williams was unable to put his own worries aside, he was unable to find happiness on his own.

People have bought into a lie that joy can be found in things of this world. And it's not a new lie either. Satan used that lie to lure mankind into the first sin.

Adam and Eve bought the lie that they would find true joy apart from God, that God was holding out on them. They sought to be like God and took the whole human race down with them.

We don't have any room to brag. We too are often deceived into believing that created things hold more promise than the Creator (Rom 1:25). We have "*exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator*"

Sadly, too many see this season just as an opportunity to have their personal wants and desires met. People often look for happiness in the things of this world.

"If only I could have" or "If only I could be" are the longings of the unfulfilled. Even those who have it all—wealth, fame, and fortune—ultimately some do not rejoice in their lot. In North America, there are an estimated five hundred thousand households with assets of more than \$10 million!

Yet even with all of their incredible net worth, their planes, yachts, and mega-homes, many find that the more they spend, the more they want, they seem to think that more things will bring happiness, they just haven't found the right thing yet. It is so common that there is even a term for the condition: Wealth Fatigue Syndrome (WFS).

But things just don't deliver, no matter how many you have. Solomon called it "*vanity and a striving after wind*" (Eccl 2:11).

Jesus, however, put things into eternal perspective: “*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?*” (Mt 16:26).

There are other people who are looking for the very same reason to rejoice but believe a life of joy is not possible for them because of their poverty or hard circumstances.

This belief is just as wrong as the one before because it also believes the basis for happiness is life, wealth, identity— something different from what God promises.

The result is often to blame God and be angry at Him. And the sad part of that is that this gets in the way of seeing how much He wants to fill us with joy.

Ultimately, it is our sinful nature that causes unhappiness, sadness, sorrow, and desperation. Striving after things separates us from God, the true joy-giver. And it always leads to death, both temporal and spiritual.

Our text points us beyond the temporary things of this life. St. Paul, even in most difficult circumstances, urges us to “*rejoice in the Lord always*” (v 4).

Our reason for rejoicing is found “in the Lord” in the first place. If we look to other things, we are starting off in the wrong place.

We have joy because Christ conquered sin and death for us. All other things are temporary. When we chase stuff, we are robbing ourselves of hope and joy.

Sin, death and the devil have been defeated at the cross through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

Since the sin that separated us from God has been removed by the cross of Christ, we are now reunited with Him; we are “in the Lord” because of Jesus.

Therefore He calls us His children no matter what our condition or station in life. Our relationship with Him is based on grace, His grace.

That knowledge should give us a new sense of purpose in life, a reason to serve with joy; we rejoice to know our Father smiles on our service when it is done in His name.

And we can live in this joyful purpose because our sins are forgiven.

We have joy in the promise of Christ's abiding presence: "*The Lord is at hand*" (v 5).

Christians do not need to be anxious about life (v 6a) because the Lord who is at hand cares deeply for us. We can be joyful because He invites us to commit all of our cares and concerns to Him (v 6b).

We can be so confident of His care for us that even as we offer our prayers, we can already add thanksgiving, no matter the circumstances that we may find ourselves in; happy or sad.

We rejoice that He came as a baby in Bethlehem. We praise Him for carrying our sins to the cross. We continue to rejoice that He promises to come again. Even though we do not know when, we do know it will happen.

Jesus came into our world the first time in humility. His life on this earth purified us so that we will rejoice—not tremble—when He comes again in glory.

In the meantime, the peace of God, which is far beyond all understanding and guards our hearts and minds, is given to us in the Gospel (v 7).

It is a peace that is based on the fact that God has now reconciled us "*in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,*" (Col 1:22)

This is the peace of God and it is a peace that endures. a peace guards and sustains us in our reason for rejoicing.

No matter what circumstance or season we find ourselves in, God gives us a reason to rejoice. He is and will always be at hand to forgive, sustain, and support us.

With the assurance of His love and presence in Christ Jesus, we can place all that we are and all that we have in His hands for time and eternity and rejoice in His grace and mercy toward us.

Thanks be to God!

Amen!

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

### **Sermon Outline**

#### ***Rejoice! The Lord Is at Hand!***

*Philippians 4:4-7*

- I. Many people think they need to find their own reason to rejoice.
- II. Our reason for rejoicing is found in the Lord.
- III. We rejoice in His promise to come again.