

December 25th: Joy in Happiness

It's time for our last Joy sermon. If that makes you sad, fear not, we got a good one today. Our premise for today is: the Christian has Joy in Happiness. That may seem a bit silly or redundant, but throughout the series on joy, in basically every sermon I've made it a point to remind us that happiness and joy are not congruent. Joy is deeper, joy is in your spirit and can be present even in not so happy circumstances. In fact I did a whole sermon on Joy in Suffering.

But today is a day of joy and happiness. Because the Savior has come, that's something good. And my goal is to remind us that it is OK to celebrate that. It is ok to be happy.

That may seem a bit obvious, and it may align pretty close with our previous premise that "The Christian has joy in a joyful God," but consider the condition called cherophobia, the fear of being happy. It's more common than you might think. In fact, I think most of us can probably relate. Cherophobia is a fear of happiness, not because they don't like the feeling of being happy, but simply because they know it won't last.

Everything's going right in life... uh oh, that means it's only a matter of time until it goes away, until something changes. The family gathering at Christmas is amazing but, it's going so fast, the kids will leave soon! The child on summer

break sees the back-to-school signs go up, “oh no! Summer is slipping away!” The man turns 40 and realizes he didn’t accomplish those dreams of his youth. And so the anxiety of joy leaving makes us unable to enjoy the happiness while it’s still right there in front of us!

I had AP biology my last period of the day Junior year. My biology professor, Mr. Skinner, on Fridays, had to deal with 30 high schoolers chomping at the bit to get to the weekend. He liked to taunt us, “Don’t be so excited for the weekend, this class is better than the weekend. Right now, your whole weekend is in front of you, it could be the best weekend of your life! But once that bell rings, your weekend starts going away, wasting away, unfulfilled.” He was cruel.

But at Christmas we get a happiness that will not and cannot fade. Yes there are evils in this world, and we don’t have to pretend there aren’t. But our God has given us an eternal gift in his Son. The Son who died but was raised up to never die again.

Our vacations may come to an end, the best days of our life here may come and go, but make no mistake, our happiness, our joy is secure, sealed in blood. We have eternal life! Which means that in the good times, in the happy times, don’t be afraid, it might wax and wain here, but one day, it will be complete, and never ending. Jesus tells his disciples in John 16: “So 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.”

I’ve told you this before, but it bears repeating, I go to nursing homes and I tell those Christians, they have good days ahead of them. And it’s the same for those with chronic illness, it’s the same for the one in the mid-life crisis, it’s the same for the one who is lonely, who is depressed, you have good days ahead of you.

Because Christ has come and gives you life and joy eternal. He will make all things new.

And he is with us now to strengthen us in Word and Sacrament. Celebrate that! Rejoice in it! We don’t know what tomorrow brings, but we don’t have to worry so much about tomorrow, the Lord will bring what he wills, but we have grace upon grace today, rejoice in it! You have permission.

You have permission to enjoy the blessings the Lord gives us, and you don’t have to brainwash yourself into thinking that all the problems are gone or will never come your way. Not at all. But rather, when the time for mourning comes, don’t worry, we will mourn. When the time of pain comes, don’t worry, we will hurt. But when a time of rejoicing comes, why would we not rejoice? When there is something worth celebrating, why would we not celebrate!?! We never pass up an opportunity, it seems, to be sad or angry, why do we skip over happiness?

And today, folks, we have reason to rejoice. God is with us. The promise long foretold came true. God keeps his promise on Christmas to send a Savior, praise God! And that Savior died and rose just like he promised, praise God. Which means, our God has put together a pretty good track record of keeping his promises, no? Which means his promises to you, that his death forgives you, that he is with us when we gather, that he comes to us in body and blood, that we have eternal life... I think he will keep those promises too. That's reason for joy, deep, deep joy, in our bones and spirit, but it's also reason for a little happiness. Enjoy it. You have the Lord's permission and his promise that your joy will be unending. In Jesus' name. Amen.