



EASTWOOD UNITING CHURCH

14 - 16 Lakeside Road, Eastwood

11 October 2020 Pentecost 19

*This worship service has been prepared by
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GREETING AND CALL TO WORSHIP

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

God's steadfast love endures for ever. Psalm 106

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF LAND

We acknowledge the Wallumattagal people of the Dharug/Eora group, the first inhabitants of this place.

We honour them for their custodianship of the land, on which we gather today.

GATHERING PRAYER

Take a few moments to gather your soul into the presence of God.

What am I worried about? (Name it.)

**May the peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep my heart and mind in Christ Jesus.**

What am I thankful for? (Name it.)

**May the peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep my heart and mind in Christ Jesus.**

What do I hope to hear today?

**May the peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep my heart and mind in Christ Jesus.**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Let us hear what God is saying, both as Law and as Grace.

Hear the law of Moses:

You shall have no other gods but me.

You shall not make yourselves idols to worship or serve.

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

Spirit of God, search our hearts.

Honour your father and mother.

Do not murder.

Do not commit adultery.

Do not steal.

Do not tell lies.

Do not covet anything which belongs to your neighbour.

Spirit of God, search our hearts.

Hear the law of Christ:

You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart and with all your soul
and with all your mind and with all your strength.
You shall love your neighbour as yourself.

Spirit of God, search our hearts.

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right,
whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable –
if anything is excellent or worthy of praise –
let your heart rest on these things.

***Spirit of God, search our hearts –
and fill them with the goodness and truth of Jesus our Lord.***

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever.

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,
keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus,
as you hear Christ's word of grace to us:
"Your sins are forgiven."

Thanks be to God!

THE PEACE

As we offer our lives to God, we offer our lives to each other in friendship
and service:

May the peace of God be with you.

And also with you.

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD**Philippians 4:1-9**

- ¹ My brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for,
my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!
- ² I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche
to be of the same mind in the Lord.
- ³ Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women
since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel,
along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers,
whose names are in the book of life.
- ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!
- ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.
- ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation,
by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
- ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
- ⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters,
whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right,
whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable –
if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.
- ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me,
or seen in me – put it into practice.
And the God of peace will be with you.

For the Lord of the Word:

Thanks be to God.

MEDITATION

Over the past few weeks we have had the joy of reading Paul's letter to the Philippians – I hope you have followed along and enjoyed it. If not, hit PAUSE and read it now – it's the most encouraging four pages in the Bible! Don't forget to come back though!!

Today's reading sums up its theme and mood: in all circumstances, REJOICE IN THE LORD.

Paul writes from one of his occasional prison stays to his dear friends in Philippi, rejoicing with a prayer of the deepest and love for them, his most steadfast supporters. The prisoner's mood is surprisingly *joyful*.

In ch.1 Paul reflects: 'Things could be worse! He is confident of his eventual release: not because he trusts in Roman justice, but because God knows his people need him. However he is also quite ready to die and meet his Saviour. "I am hard pressed between the two! For me, to live is Christ, to die is gain" (1:21-24).

The Philippians' own quality of living in harmony and love are another source of joy. "Always have among yourselves the mind of Christ, who, though in the form of God," he sings in ch.2, emptied himself, became a human servant, and died the worst of deaths on the cross. But in his humility he was exalted again to the glory of God. This humble God was shown to be the Lord of all creation. This, says Paul, is the form and nature of our God. **The humble love of Christ is the shape of our life.**

So, what does Paul feel? Joy! Paul encourages his people to live well, in innocence and peace. If the "crooked and perverse" world seems harsh, no matter – they hold onto the word of life, shining like stars, with plenty of reason to rejoice and be glad together with Paul (2:18).

In ch. 3 Paul pauses to remind them that this joy is a gift. Joyful Christian living is not a reward for keeping God's law, like the Pharisee he was. Paul has tried pleasing God through the Law, and is now certain that only through faith, humbly sharing in Christ's sufferings, can we come to know Christ's righteousness and resurrection. (Reread ch. 3 and you will start humming 'When I Survey the Wondrous Cross'.)

Life can be a struggle, Paul agrees. But rejoice, you Citizens of Heaven: as the suffering Christ was raised to God, so your struggling bodies will also take the form of his exalted body, to the glory of God the Father.

And so this Philippians summary brings us to today's closing chapter 4. What is Paul's tone?

Rejoice in the Lord always: I'll say it again, Rejoice!

"My brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my crowning joy, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!"

What is joy? Is joy anything more than a fleeting happy feeling? Can we feel joy in the face of suffering and hardship, as Paul asserts?

I mean, we have plenty of reasons **not** to rejoice.

For a start, it's 2020. Hard to think of a worse year!

It was bad enough starting with the NSW bushfires, until the forest fires in California outdid them. The global pandemic, with loss of life and livelihood; unemployment, business and economic collapse, a deep financial depression; the pressure placed on our young and our old; the strain on our churches as we stay separated; as we face the change of leadership; as our people suffer alone;

the rolling debacle of Trump, and the once-reliable USA standing by as tyrannical leaders test their strength.

I was badly affected by the explosion in Beirut, having good Armenian friends and colleagues there; followed by the war in Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh which I have visited twice in the last 3 years.

What shall we say – Cheer up, it could be worse???

Christian JOY is more than just happiness.

And YES, we can **BE** joyful, even when we don't feel very happy.

Joy is a true emotion, more than just a feeling.

It is a state of being in Christ, closely linked to Faith, Hope and Love.

Let me use that frame to hang some thoughts upon.

Faith: Is the conviction of things unseen, says Hebrews: We believe in the unseen reality of God, which in Christian faith can only mean we trust that Christ is alive and is present with us in the Holy Spirit.

Faith and joy sustain each other. Joy opens our hearts to the deeper reality of faith: That reality brings us joy.

"Do not worry about anything", Paul says: "**The Lord is near.**" In the midst of our most paralyzing anxiety, **Christ Emmanuel is with us.**

So Paul is joyful in prison, and we can remain faithful in 2020.

Faith becomes joyful when we practice it as a habit: of heart and mind and soul and strength. Paul: **Keep on doing** the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and **the God of peace will be with you**. *Have Faith: The Lord is near.*

But which Lord? The Lord of Philippians 2, of course, the only Lord over all creation – the Christ who emptied himself of godlike status and took on human form; the God so human that he lived and died with us; the human being so full of God that he rises to the fulness of God, raising our human lives with him. That Lord is near. Stand firm in faith.

Hope is anticipated Joy (Moltmann). Holy hope says, ‘whatever problems we face now, I believe in what is coming towards us from God’s future, already on its way, already breaking through! Do you have eyes to see it? In hope, I feel that the joy to come is already here.

Paul has hope that two of his women ministers, Euodia and Syntyche, will be able to resolve their differences over the mission plan and will rejoice again with the whole church (vs 2-3). Why? Well, their names are already in the Book of Life with Clement and the rest, so that future joy will rush to meet them in the present. Joy is coming – so feel it now!

Faithful Hope in the presence of God leads to joyful prayer (1:3-4, 4:6-7). Our requests are made, not with worry, but with thankfulness and in God’s peace.

Joy comes to us as a gift from God’s hoped-for future.

In the midst of the pandemic there is room for joy. Maybe joy came in the birth of a grandchild. And though you couldn’t visit her in Qld, joy came by learning to Zoom! And when the church expected to die out in three months, joy came through practical care and helping each other with technology! Joy comes in the unexpected gift more than in the expected weekly pay packet.

Joy comes as a gift from God’s future hope, the New Creation. As we anticipate God’s new Heaven and Earth, the New Jerusalem, the New Creation, so we start to find glimpses of people finding God in new and life-giving ways; of politics and society which cooperates across party lines and seeks the wellbeing of all people; of refreshment of nature and

a sabbath for the climate. And more importantly, the Spirit helps us live into that future – to be part of the solution, not the problem. We can learn to live our Joyful future KOH hope today:

Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, pure, pleasing, commendable, if there is any excellence and anything worthy of praise, think about these things... *and keep on doing them.* (vs 8-9)

Joy hangs upon Faith, Hope and finally **Love**.

Because you share Christ's joy, you will show gentleness during panic and duress (3, 5); generosity instead of self-concern (vs 15-19); the mind of Christ rather than ambition or conceit (2:1-3); loving wisdom when the world is going crazy (1:9-11). How have you shown generous love during lockdown or crisis time? It's not too late!

Philippians is Paul's letter of love to the church at Philippi, and by God's grace, to this church today. Beloved in Christ, Rejoice in the Lord!
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

OUR RESPONSE:

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

We offer our heart-felt prayers in faith, hope and love;
in expectation of their fulfilment and the joy of celebration.

Rejoice in the Lord! Let us say it again:

Rejoice in the Lord!

In the time of pandemic and extraordinary needs,
for sacrificial love given by loved ones, friends, strangers,
in service of humanity, a community, an individual,
we pray and commit ourselves to be bringers of joy.

Let us say it again:

Rejoice in the Lord!

For those in need of restoration and new life,
those without hope, with little faith, with few resources;
In Australia and Beirut, in Armenia and Artsakh,
in our own homes and community, we pray
and commit ourselves to be bringers of joy.

Let us say it again:

Rejoice in the Lord!

For the suffering which brings hope and gives life,
perseverance in the face of difficulty and danger
we pray and commit ourselves to be bringers of joy.

Let us say it again:

Rejoice in the Lord!

For those who are serving our communities at this time;
for our ministers fulfilling their commissions
and for those chosen by the Spirit;
for all those who lead and serve in the shape of the humble Christ,
we pray, committing ourselves to be bringers of joy.

Let us say it again:

Rejoice in the Lord!

In quiet thankfulness we bring our prayers for ourselves and those near
to us...

we pray and commit ourselves to be bringers of joy.

Let us say it again:

Rejoice in the Lord! Amen.

THE EUCHARIST

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

All thanks and praise, glory and honour
be yours, eternal God,
because you have created all things
and you sustain us with your powerful word.
The heavens proclaim all the glories of God,
and your people give you thanks and praise forever.

**We praise you, O God,
that in your mercy you gave your only son, Jesus Christ,
our faith, our hope, our love, our joy.**

Though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form, he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore you, our God, highly exalted him
and gave him the name that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

And so with angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven,
we magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying:

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory –
Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest!***

God of glory, we remember how Jesus,
at supper with his friends,
took bread, blessed it, broke it,
and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take this and eat it.
This is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.

After supper, he took the cup, again gave thanks,
and gave it to them, saying:

This is my blood of the new covenant
Shed for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, whenever you drink it,
in remembrance of me.

By your Word and Holy Spirit,
bless and sanctify these gifts
that we may share Christ's body and blood,
and bless us that we might become, by grace,
his body given for the sake of the world.
Receive this our sacrifice of praise.

Through your Son Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit in your holy church,
all honour and glory is yours, Almighty Father,
now and forever. Amen.

We share this bread, distant in body but together in faith.
Receive this holy sacrament
of the body and blood of Christ,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

BLESSING

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!
Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.
Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation,
with prayers and thanksgiving, give your whole life to God.
And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
May the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you now and remain with you always.
Amen.