

What an exciting and wonderful response in this community for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Celebration. I am barely constrained from shouting out with joy for the prayers and all other participation so many of you found yourself involved in during that time. I loved our representation in the parade – thank you for representing our congregation and setting an example inspired by our Heavenly Father. Praise the Lord for all the prayers and preparation for the celebration of VBS this week. In fact let's just pause a moment and as a family lift up that effort and everyone directly involved or indirectly involved by praying and some perhaps even fasting with prayer for a dynamic ministry to the praise and glory of God on His heavenly throne....

With our nations values being constantly challenged and the continuing effort to remove God and His inspiration and revelation to our founding fathers – the celebration of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July has never been more needed to be reminded of why we have the freedoms that still remain.

Celebrating itself is not necessarily a main line doctrinal issue we spend much time studying or talking about. Perhaps it should be though! Because there is lots of celebrating represented throughout scripture. AND our own yearly calendar is full of celebrations for everything imaginable with others being proposed all the time.

I commend the attitude and basic purpose of celebrating –which is to communicate thankfulness to the Creator for the time or event of the given celebration. **EVERY CELEBRATION in which the righteous are involved IS an effort to communicate thankfulness to God and be reminded of our dependence on His Sovereign love and mercy.**

In my word search for “celebrate” it gave me 68 Bible verses in the NIV, and that does not included other forms of the word like celebrated, celebrating, celebrates or rejoice and its forms! The very first reference is Exodus 10:9 and is Moses explaining to Pharaoh a reason the Israelites want to be permitted to leave Egypt. *Moses answered, “We will go with our young and our old, with our sons and our daughters, and with our flocks and herds, because we are to **celebrate** a festival to the LORD.”*

That first mention of celebrate was for the purpose of honoring and thanksgiving to Creator God for His blessings. **If we think about it a moment for those who acknowledge God as Creator/Sustainer, the basis of any celebration is rightfully recognizing God first and foremost.** The 4<sup>th</sup> of July is unmistakably founded on celebrating the Declaration of Independence and Constitution for which we proclaimed Let Freedom Ring last week as a gift inspired and initiated by God.

The Psalmist sure recognized and proclaimed that fact in Psalm 150 ESV *Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! 2 Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! 3 Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! 4 Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! 5 Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! 6 **Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!***

There it is!!! That 6<sup>th</sup> verse clears the air for the basis of any and every celebration:  
**6 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!**

Back in Exodus 12:14, we are taught: *“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance.* //From 1500 BC to 2022 AD we are still obediently celebrating that lasting ordinance. We think of it in terms of Easter or Resurrection but it was originally Passover commemorating the leading of Israel as slaves out of Egypt after the plague of the firstborn and the marking of all Israel’s dwellings with blood around their door-frames so the death angel would spare their firstborn. Jesus entered Jerusalem and was crucified on Passover followed in 3 days with His resurrection. ~~Next year Passover is Wednesday April 5—Thursday April 13 2023.~~

Could I be so outlandishly convicted of the importance of celebrating properly that it could be said those who have not marked the threshold of their homes and lives with the absolute truths of God’s righteous and are not celebrating under the protection of the umbrella of righteousness are setting themselves up for the same results Pharaoh's Egyptians who all lost their firstborn and later his army suffered were drowned in the sea?

That idea is substantiated in Exodus 23:15 ***Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Aviv, for in that month you came out of Egypt.*** *“No one is to appear before me empty-handed. //Empty handed for our generation is coming before the Lord in celebration without remembering the freedoms promised, proclaimed and received under righteousness,/// but instead being browbeaten and tricked by satan to believe and practice that ones education, experience, and personal logic and desires supplant that of God who created us! // Empty handed for our generation is any celebration that has become purely secularized without Praising God as the center and highest goal.*

Another Jewish feast that supports this argument is Exodus 23:16 ***“Celebrate the Festival of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. “Celebrate the Festival of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field.*** Do you see how celebration is not only that which brings delight to the soul, but also an ever present reminder of the source of everything and in this case that which sustains the flesh and blood body and it’s functions. There are other celebrations mentioned throughout scripture for the illumination of our faith maturity through seeking and modeling righteousness in every aspect of our existence.

Now with those thoughts of the scriptural blessing of scripture to celebrate under our belt some applications are forthcoming: Next in importance to the celebrations for our reminders of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus on our calendars - is the celebration when someone acknowledges Jesus as Lord and follows through with baptism. That wonderful and excellent celebration results from what I call the first principle for Seeking the Lost. For that principle we turn to Jesus Himself for the model: Luke 15:1-2 *Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear Him.(Jesus) 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."* NIV

In seeking others to become believers it starts by remembering we are not the judge of anyone's eternal destiny because of what we may know of their life experiences as did the Pharisees. Rather our duty as believers is to encourage others (and Christ died for all, not just those we "think" he died for) and to plant and water the seeds of faith and righteousness, and LEAVE THE JUDGING TO GOD.

What were the Pharisees doing? rejecting - discouraging - belittling (verse 2 *But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*)

On the other hand what was Jesus doing? accepting - encouraging - challenging... (following in the Luke 15 passage, in verse 7 *I tell you that in the same way there will be more **rejoicing in heaven** over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*)

THE CHRISTIAN'S OBJECTIVE is to do everything we can understand to do to make Meeker Christian Church a place that unconditionally loves and welcomes those who are struggling to find their purposes in life and identity in Jesus. ///We are not making any excuse for sin, but making every opportunity to help others just as we were helped to flee from our sin toward the open, welcoming, loving arms of JESUS. Folks when that happens it is a time for celebrating!!! Celebrating the repentant sinner I believe is second only in importance to those celebrations Jesus.

That compelling example comes from the lost son parable beginning in Luke 15 verse 11..we'll pick up the story in Luke 15:21-24 *"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'* 22 *"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a **feast and celebrate.** 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to **celebrate.** NIV*

What did the son do? Repented of his satan inspired and motivated failures.

What did the father do? provided a celebration of the repentant son without judgment!

As a Coloradoan I assume you were excited that the Avalanche Hockey Team won the Stanley Cup. The best of the best for 2022 in their sport. That is the attitude I am talking about celebrating in the life restored to a repentant sinner. It is something wonderful to celebrate. Far beyond the reason for celebrating the Stanley Cup victory is the celebrating of a lost sinner. Far beyond a temporary one year celebration for the Stanley Cup which has to be earned or lost the next season is the wonderful celebration of a soul saved for eternity!

Today we believers are comfortable and mostly content. And in a sense I am sorry. /// You know more people who are confused about salvation than not. In some cases you have tried to reach them for Jesus and not found much success, but please do not give up. Be persistent like our Jesus. If you have given up on everything else then pray more, pray specifically, pray sacrificing your comfort and contentment - to recognize when and how to encourage them in faith for salvation. It is okay to weep for lost souls - Jesus did,/// it is okay to suffer for lost souls - Jesus did, because He could see the eternal destiny of Jesus' domain for believers or satan's domain for unbelievers./// You know enough about that to set as a goal in life to pray for

and witness when given opportunity to others who who have not attained your level of faith in Jesus.

The goal of this presentation on celebration is approached by asking you to give consideration to something. What is the absolute most important event in your personal life?/// It is the most important event with an eternal consequence but we generally give the least attention to in our lives? /// It is not the day of your physical birth because we are generally very good celebrating and honoring birthdays. And the most important celebration is not even our wedding anniversary, though it is exceptionally valuable and should be celebrated. Of course you now have deduced that this very most important celebration is when we accepted Jesus and followed through that acceptance with baptism. ///Shouldn't there be a time of celebration of your own, your personal conversion to Jesus Christ and commitment to live by an ever growing faith in righteousness for the praise and glory of He who created and redeemed us? A celebration to be reminded of our reason for living and purpose of life?

Here is what I want you to consider... Could we as a church family chose a time just for celebration of our 2<sup>nd</sup> births. A time when everyone would give a brief testimony of when that happened and how it impacted their life. Perhaps we could dedicate a dinner and/or worship service after the type of our recent prayer service. I don't have an answer, but I have a passion that we should be reminded over and over celebrating our salvation! I know how much God loves you and that needs a constant reminder which a celebration of our salvation is the most important news of our personal essence...

From the parable of the talents: Matthew 25:21 & repeated in verse 23 *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.. That is celebrating!*

We can be full of joy: Isaiah 55:12 *You will go out in **joy** and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and **all** the trees of the field will clap their hands. That sounds like celebrating!*

Psalms 70:4 But may all who seek you **rejoice** and be glad in you; may those who long for your saving help **always** say, “The LORD is great!” That is celebrating!

Philippians 4:4 **Rejoice** in the Lord **always**. I will say it again: **Rejoice!**

And 1 Thessalonians 5:16 **Rejoice always**, That is celebrating in thanksgiving to our Lord God.

Perhaps you can't remember the exact date of your salvation experience, perhaps you have assumed you were saved because of something your parents did for you or something somebody else said or did for you. Or you might even question if you said or did the right thing to be saved. Well then you may want to use this days date as the day for celebrating or perhaps even as a re-commitment of that earlier date that we want to celebrate from now on, on a regular basis as a testimony and example to the world: then let me encourage you as we sing the invitation hymn - that right where you stand - ask God's forgiveness and celebrate in your heart HIS unconditional love.

Or if you do not have a salvation date or just not sure, or perhaps have never accepted Jesus as Lord and followed through with baptism listen to Acts 2:38-39 and hear the invitation from the word of GOD to become a Christian: 38 *Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of*

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*you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." NIV*

If you have heard and understood and have a need then please come forward and speak with me as we sing or anytime afterward.