

REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: APRIL 16

Paul, writing to the church in Philippi, encourages his listeners to *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4.4-7).

Paul writes to churches meeting in homes he helped establish. While there is some conflict in the community of faith in Philippi that the letter addresses, Philippians has the tone of an extended "thank you", as Paul thanks the people of Philippi for supporting him financially and with prayer during his missionary expeditions.

Here he is wrapping up his thoughts, and his focus is on rejoicing, being gentle, not worrying, and for the believers to sustain themselves with prayer and supplication to God. The result will be the peace—the well-being—of God will guard their hearts and their minds.

What causes you to rejoice? What peace do you experience in your rejoicing in the Lord? I invite you to reflect with me on rejoicing...

REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: APRIL 17

REJOICING BY PRAYING FOR ANOTHER

One of the great privileges of being a friend, an acquaintance, or even someone who simply chooses to care for another is the privilege of praying. The opportunity can be a formatted prayer, or it can be simply an expression of concern shared and shown by speaking another's name and to their condition wrapped in an expression of hope for them.

This is not something to be over-thought. One can do this as a regular part of a spiritual discipline—say a time of prayer and meditation at some point during the day—and/or it can be a more spontaneous offering.

Would you like to have your time standing in line at any type of store more useful? I had a preaching professor that regularly told his students that they should never leave the grocery store without a sermon illustration, especially given the magazines that are often found in the checkout aisles. I would recommend that you use the time for prayer, given how it can be a marvelous use of the time to "rejoice...always".

For me, waiting at a stoplight is another time to be praying usefully and faithfully. What have you found useful for you?

REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: APRIL 18

REJOICING IN GENTLENESS

Paul encourages the believers in Philippi to "Let your gentleness be known to everyone." How is your gentleness made known to others? Do you desire to, appreciate the ability to embody gentleness? Is gentleness part of your nature? Were you nurtured in gentleness, and if so, by whom in your family of origin or friends in your midst?

How does the word gentleness reside in your head and your heart? Is it a synonym for compassion, or perhaps weakness? With whom are you most likely to express gentleness: a baby, an elderly person, the one with whom you share romantic love, friend, or stranger? Or are you more inclined to share gentleness as a response to a lack of gentleness on the part of another?

How could you make time to rejoice in your gentleness today? With whom would you extend gentleness to? Could you revisit a conversation that didn't end well with a gentle invitation to resume the discussion? Could you make a phone call, send a text, or an email, or some other contact with someone who is experiencing a challenging time in their life?

Blessings as you find your way to rejoice in gentleness!

REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: APRIL 19

REJOICING IN NOT BEING OVERHWELMED BY WORRY

Paul echoes a significant teaching of Jesus when he encourages his listeners, the believers in Philippi, to "not worry about anything." Perhaps one of the most misunderstood of all teachings by Jesus and those who taught in his name, this admonition can lead to more, rather than less worrying.

Worrying is a natural human condition. It is a gift to us if and when we want to pay attention to how and when we find ourselves in a state of worry. Jesus and Paul are not trying to tell us to scrub this insight from our life, simply not to be overwhelmed by worry. Both would suggest that a proper response to worry is to trust in the Lord, to offer your worry to God, and to do so faithfully we best help ourselves by understanding how we can worry well. To paraphrase journalism training, "who, what, where, when, why, and how" am I worrying about?

Such a practice will automatically reduce the threat of being overwhelmed by worry. Who knows you better than yourself? Can you be non-judgmental in your self-assessment? If you need help, trust God to help you worry well.

REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: APRIL 20

REJOICING IN GOD'S PEACE

Paul reminds his friends in Philippi that God's peace is available to them. Peace as a blessing bestowed by Jesus on his disciples is frequently found in the Gospels, particularly the Gospel of John during their waning days together in person. Peace is the English word for Shalom in Hebrew.

Shalom means more than the absence of violence or conflict. Shalom means well-being, a sense of balance which can be embodied even in the midst of violence or conflict. It is the embodiment of being whole in the midst of dis-ease, being calm in the midst of challenges, being hopeful in the midst of chaos. It is a reminder of God's creation, of how God created order out of chaos, taking the raw materials that were chaos and rearranging them in a creative and generative form and fashion.

Embodying God's peace, God's Shalom, God's well-being is a faithful way of being a co-creator with God in our own lives as well as relating to others. Experiencing well-being in our own skin is the best way for us to offer a healthy witness to God's peace with others.

How do you find yourself rejoicing in God's peace?

REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: APRIL 21

REJOICING IN THE CONNECTION OF YOUR HEAD AND YOUR HEART

Paul believes that a willingness to be embraced by God's peace, by God's Shalom, has physical as well as mental and emotional implications: *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*".

This makes sense, given how our bodies are systems, not simply a collection of parts. A physical challenge can affect us emotionally and mentally and vice versa. When we visit a doctor, or physician's assistant or nurse practitioner, as is becoming common, we are asked questions that allow the medical professional to assess how our presenting issue might be influenced by something else that is going on.

Someone once said that the furthest distance that all of us can travel successfully is the foot and a half between our head and our heart. I know this has been true for me, and continues to be true for me. Do I have the willingness, the capacity, to keep this channel of self-awareness, of well-being open? Do you?

How does God's peace help keep your head and your heart, your heart and your mind in sync, equipping you to rejoice?

REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: APRIL 22

REJOICING ALWAYS AND IN ALL WAYS

Paul has the courage (or audacity) to encourage (interesting word, encourage means to "express courage by offering another support"), us to "rejoice in the Lord always". In another interesting twist on/of words, the phrase could be "rejoice in the Lord always and in all ways."

This is a phrase that I use when seeking to live into Paul's suggestion (or any other "always"). The reality is that it is too easy for me to protest that "always" is, well, impossible, or at least unrealistic, perhaps too Pollyanna-ish. To turn the phrase around allows for rejoicing to be possible in "all ways" even when it might be challenging to do so "always" in the given moment, even at the risk of appearing Pollyanna. Because there is always (and in all ways) the reality of both/and, even in the face of real challenges.

Challenges and comforts, comforts and challenges. Amidst challenges there are also comforts. Perhaps the willingness to acknowledge the comforts that come our way, even in the midst of the challenges, is one way to "rejoice in the Lord...always."

What comforts have come your way in the midst of the challenges of this day?