

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from October 11, 2020



Instrumental pre-service music *Peace Like a River*

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Peace like a river, love like an ocean, joy like a fountain. Jesus said he came that our life might be full, and that our joy would be complete. (John 10:10, 15:11) Today we hear about people who couldn't help but to rejoice in our Savior's victorious grace. They didn't necessarily rejoice because of improved circumstances, they rejoiced because as they relied on Christ, his presence gave them the strength to live fully and faithfully. Let's pray. Everlasting God, we tune in to you so you can pour out your mercy on us. We seek your forgiveness and healing renewal. We gratefully pursue the good works of a full life as you lead us, bringing joy to our hearts and to your holy name, Jesus, and it is in his name that we pray. Amen.

Hymn # 380 1,2,4 *There's Within My Heart*

Call to Worship

Our call to worship carries forward the theme of joy.

My Lord, you have been our home forever and ever. You were God before the mountains were born, before the earth and the world were made.

You have always been and will always be God!

Satisfy us with your unfailing love every morning

that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

Make us glad... for as many years as we have seen trouble. Let your servants see the wonderful things you can do for them. And let their children see your glory.

Lord, our God, be kind to us.

Make everything we do successful.

yes, establish the work of our hands. (Psalm 90:1-2,14-17 (ERV, NIV blended))

Prayers

When we get to the Bible passage, we will find ideas there are in today's prayer chorus. Paul claims he lived as our chorus says the Spirit lives.

Prayer Chorus # 2123 *Loving Spirit*

Pastor's Almighty Father, when circumstances create concern, deal dread, fill us with frustration, tempts to tear us down, we are relieved by the reminder that you are the Lord overall and nothing is beyond your choice to control, and in your love you are always able to make a way, in your time and in your will, to answer all our problems and supply all our true needs. You are our shelter in storms, the bringer of victory, and our hearts burn with gratitude for all you had done and are doing in our life and world. This is why we are eager to lift to you all that you place on our heart and mind in this next moment of silence. **SILENCE.**

Quilt Prayer And today we also name and lift before you 3-year-old Liam who has serious heart issues. Shower him with blessings and fill him with your spirit. We ask that through this quilt, he and his parents' faith will be strengthened by the loving care of this congregation -- and by your tender compassion.

As the quilt is wrapped around him, Let Liam feel your comfort, that he and his parents will find the confidence that the promise of your presence in our lives is real, through difficult as well as joyous times. Give them your strength and understanding whenever they feel weak and stress tempts them to falter. In all things, let them feel the care we offer to and for them through you as expressed by this quilt. Calm their hearts with your peace. Let them look forward to each day as precious. We pray this blessing in the name of the one who endures with us all our joys and sorrows.

And along with Liam, we have lifted all our praises and needs to you, because even when we don't see a way through our next phase of life, you, in your love and strength, are working behind the scenes, creating a way that will guide us to a time when you will have everything in its place. And when you are ready, and in your way, you will do something new in our lives. In the meantime, we will continue striving to live as you taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

Theme

Consider this question quietly. When you are at home, what are some of the things you really like to do? (**Brief Pause**). What are some of the things you don't like to do? (**Brief Pause**). *Why* did you choose to like what you like, and not like what you don't like? While true of some things, most often, I don't think our like or dislike is inherent in the activity itself. Some people love skydiving and roller coasters, others, you couldn't pay them enough to do either. Some people love housekeeping chores and you can hardly get them to stop. Others can't stand

them, and it is all you can do to inspire them to do minimal jobs. Some of our likes and dislikes seem to come natural to us, others became “an acquired taste”. We don’t like some activities because we struggle to be good at them. Or they are too easy and become boring. But I suspect that most often we learn to like or dislike activities by people who were influences on us (parents, peers, relationships, or associates we want to impress) who reveal to us by their words, actions, reactions, and attitudes how we are supposed to feel about any given activity, and over time, we join in their point of view.

I remember when Mitchell, my oldest son, was 2. He wasn’t able to plug in or turn on the vacuum cleaner, but he’d reach up and grab the handle and push it all over the house. When he was older, he couldn’t wait to mow the lawn. I’m not sure why they make useless toys when you can have fun with the real things and have the added bonus of accomplishing something. When I was young - a tween or teen, I remember one of the most fun things I did was vacation on my grandpa’s farm for a week, stand on the tractor-pulled wagon under the blistering sun, and scratch up my arms from near shoulder to fingertip as I helped bail hay. I don’t think all who lived on that farm saw it as fun. But I did.

In our Bible series, we are talking about a man named Paul who was thrown in jail, then released and forced out of one town after another, and yet to the church in Philippi he wrote he learned how to be content whether it was something he really liked, or something he didn’t care for much, because he knew that everything he was doing was making life better for others and that he was pleasing God. Next week he is going to say his life is full and happy because of the people he is trying to help. He tells them they are what gives him joy and makes them proud.”

Parents and grandparents may or may not always say it or show it, but I suspect a whole lot of what they do for children and grandchildren are not things they would list in the “fun” and “I love to do that” category. But they do it anyway because their children/grandchildren are their pride and joy, and they love them even more than they dislike what they do for them. And I suspect, they will want their children/grandchildren to learn to love people so much that they will do the same.

You know what Jesus did for us: facing great opposition, suffering, and dying on the cross because he provided and showed us a new way to live and become God’s children. Did you know that in Hebrews (12:2) it says he did all that “for the joy set before him”? I don’t think that joy was just about his “reward in heaven someday”. It was about what he was able to do for each one of us -- helping us win over wrong each day, and learning to love to do things for each other...

Bible Reading 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Paul too, talks about the joy he had in sharing his life with the people of Thessalonica in spite of the persecution he and they endured. He continues his encouragement. Last week he encouraged them by assuring them of the validity and worthwhile-ness of their faith in Jesus. This week he pushes back against the popular slander and assures them of his mission team's validity and sincere motivation for living with them and teaching them about the power of Jesus. He writes,

My dear brothers and sisters, it's obvious that our ministry among you has proven to be fruitful. And though we had already suffered greatly in Philippi, where we were shamefully mistreated, we were emboldened *by faith* in our God to fearlessly preach his wonderful gospel to you in spite of incredible opposition.

Our coming alongside you to encourage you was not out of some delusion, or impure motive, or an intention to mislead you, but we have been approved by God to be those who preach the gospel. So our motivation to preach is not pleasing people but pleasing God, who thoroughly examines our hearts. God is our witness that when we came to encourage you, we never once used cunning compliments as a pretext for greed, nor did we crave the praises of men, whether you or others. Even though we could have imposed upon you our demands as apostles of Christ, instead we showed you kindness and were gentle among you.

We cared for you in the same way a nursing mother cares for her own children. With a mother's love and affectionate attachment to you, we were very happy to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our lives—because you had become so dear to us.

Beloved brothers and sisters, surely you remember how hard we labored among you. We worked night and day so that we would not become a burden to you while we preached the wonderful gospel of God. With God as our witness you saw how we lived among you—in holiness, in godly relationships, and without fault. And you know how affectionately we treated each one of you, like a loving father cares for his own children. We comforted and encouraged you and challenged you to adopt a lifestyle worthy of God, who invites you into his kingdom and glory. (TPT)

* **Hymn # 89** *Joyful, Joyful*

Message “Motivated Motivators”

A man walked into a beverage establishment and was amazed to see three men playing cards with a dog. "Can that dog really play cards?" One of them answered, "He can, but he's not very good at it. Every time he gets a good hand, his tail wags."

We cannot help but reveal what is important in our lives. And we cannot help but influence and be influenced by our experiences with each other. John Donne wrote that *no [person] is an island entire of itself; every [person] is a part of the main...* so if even one part of humanity is diminished, even a little bit; then so are we because of our connection with all of humanity.

In the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians, Paul talked about how his mission team imitated Jesus in front of the new house church in Thessalonica. They, in turn, imitated his team and in so doing modeled the Lord in front of the city; and their faith had become known throughout the region. This week in chapter 2, Paul gets more specific.

He first notes is that the mission team's example was effective. (v 1b) The tense of the phrase means their impact was not temporary, it was an ongoing (still going) influence. There was a permanent change in the direction of the lives of the believers. Paul's initial concern was that under anti-Christian pressure, this change would be undone.

Most of us probably know people who get all fired up at some special event, make promises and changes during some great success or deep crisis. The event, victory, or crisis ends and its impact fades. (Kind of like with the Lions, every week we get all excited, and then – nothing, and we are deflated 😊). No, I shouldn't have said that). As the experience fades, there is a return to the normal routine and maybe even the old habits, followed by another event, success, or challenge. Repeating events is not a problem. If it were, weekly worship services wouldn't make sense. Good habits are a healthy part of moving forward in continued personal growth. Setbacks and failures are not the problem either. A gardening metaphor helps explain. A tree seed is planted, it takes root and grows - it has good seasons where there is solid growth. It had hard seasons where it struggles to grow, limbs break off and nutrition is hard to come by -- but it keeps on growing. It never loses its tree-ness. It has no choice.

But we do have a choice. The good news of Jesus Christ is planted in our hearts. There may be good seasons of growing, and bad seasons where remaining faithful

is a struggle and painful. The fear is not about how plush or lean the years are -- the fear is that success or struggle leads to a rejection of the new life in Christ, as if the seed of Christ's life was never planted in us. Paul feared that their turning to Christ was only a temporary strategy. He feared that they didn't really want to change their life, only to reap the rewards of what they thought that new life might offer. And when the rewards didn't line up to what they hoped, when community pressure bore down on them, he feared they would give up the faith and revert to their old lifestyle of idols.

This temptation continues today -- to desire to reap the rewards of a new life without living the disciplines required for the new life to take place. We want super marriages without investing ourselves in the relationship. We want to be super parents without consistent discipline or nurturing. We want wealth without work or solid financial planning or practices. And the same is true in spiritual things: We want to be powerfully effective pray-ers without practicing the discipline of prayer. We want to know everything in the Bible without ever picking it up to read. We want to know God's will without stopping to listen and explore what that might be.

It's great that the grace of God gives us the opportunity to start over, the opportunity to pick up where we fail, deal with it and move on. We all need that from time to time, no matter how far we've progressed in our spiritual journey. But in the long haul, the rewards of Christian living don't come from temporary practices used only to help us over the speed bumps and hurdles of life. The rewards, if and when they come, come with new practices and new directions that take a lasting hold and make an ever-increasingly positive impact on our lives.

Paul praises God because he has now heard they did not reject and revert but were continuing to press forward and grow in their trust of Jesus. For Paul, it was a sure sign that their faith came upon them with power, with conviction and with the Holy Spirit (See 1 Thess 1:5) -- and it stuck -- they *continued* to grow in this new way of life.

The final analysis of Christian faith and ministries and disciplines is ultimately determined -- not by how good it felt in the moment, or how entertaining/inspiring it is; not whether there are setbacks or not, but whether or not, over the years there is an increasing strength of faith and a growing movement of the people toward God and living a more Christ-like life.

As you think back over recent years, -- does your life show signs of Christ's *ongoing* power? Is the general overall trend of your faith stronger than it was before? That is not to say there are no setbacks and failures. My weigh-in chart,

it looks more like an EKG than a – slope. But hopefully, the general long-term trend will be that there is an overall movement in the right direction. What about our faith journey? If you charted how strong and full your life is long term, which direction would it be going? Don't confuse a fuller life and blessings with better circumstances -- those are different scales (different measurements). What we are measuring is, setting aside the circumstances that surround us, are we closer to Christ? And are we able to increasingly imitate Christ's life in this modern world? Better than we could previously?

As we do that, we become examples to others of how our Christian faith takes root and grows in a person. Paul describes the successful modeling of his mission team. They continued to courageously present Christ to people even though they had been threatened and treated horribly. (v 2) Christ gave Paul such confidence that his words and actions flowed freely and easily to those around him... even when, like the dog at the card table, it was clearly not in his best interest to share his joy...

Paul was also careful not to exaggerate the claims of Christ's promises, nor misrepresent the reality of the Christian life. He shared truthfully. (vv 3a-4a)

Abraham Lincoln once tired of trying to convince a stubborn person of a certain point of view. He asked, "How many legs does a cow have?" The man answered, "Four." Lincoln agreed, "That's right. Now, suppose you call the cow's tail a leg; then how many legs would the cow have?" The man said, "Five." Lincoln answered, "No. Just because you call a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg."

Paul's message of Jesus Christ is not a 5th leg, or as Peter phrases it (in 2 Peter 1:16) a cleverly invented story. Is the message we proclaim by our words and lives include a bunch of 5th legs: exaggerations to impress, or dilutions to water it down in order to make it more palatable (more appealing) to others? Or, is Christ's life continuing to change our outlook on how we present ourselves in speech and in action, *sincerely* representing him accurately in *everything* that we do, because it is not our agenda, but God's agenda that is being moved forward.

Therefore, we not only avoid error (as best we can), our motivation for all of this is not to flatter people to trick them into the faith or the church, or to win the adulation of people by pleasing them, or for greed or any other impure motivation. (vv 3b,4b-6a).

Early in my ministry I got called to jury duty. I was hoping they would not choose me because I wanted to be on the church team that was replacing the siding on the church that same week. But I was selected. The trial was about grandparents who had been taking care of a mentally disabled mother (their daughter) and her

twin children who also had problems. But the health of the grandparents was failing, and they knew they simply couldn't do it anymore. Suddenly, the father was in the picture wanting custody. We jurors had to decide whether or not custody should go to the father, or if the state should remain involved in the welfare of these children. The most important factor in our decision had to do with the motivations of this father. Could we trust that he had the children's interests at heart? Or did he have another "secret", less noble agenda?

As we live out our faith and share it, what are our motivations and agendas? Are they sincere or do we just make them sound that way, sometimes even fooling ourselves?

It is an old joke now, but a brand-new lawyer in his brand-new office – first day. He wanted to impress and so as he sees the first person walk through the door, he grabs the phone and starts talking like he is cutting some multi-million-dollar deal, pulling in people from all over the country to this factory to get it all worked out. And he hung up the phone and asked the man how he could help him. The man said, "You can't help me at all, I'm just here to hook up your phone."

Christ has more blows dealt to him when his people *misrepresent* him by using trickery, flattery, mockery, hypocrisy, and many other wrong motivators to get people to comply with their desires.

When it comes to faith, we can have lots of goals that sound good and noble, and many may even be so. But ultimately, if our primary goal is anything less than seeking to please God himself, we have missed the mark.

Avis taught a 2d grade Sunday School class that emphasized Bible memorization. A 7-year-old boy was excited about it and was studying it in the living room. The father was watching him and asked, "So what prize or reward do you get for learning these verses?" (And there isn't necessarily anything wrong with that, I used to give out a treat at the end of every Children's Time that tied in as a reminder of the lesson, but in this case) the boy looked at his father dumbfounded for a minute, then said excitedly, "We get to learn more!"

Paul wasn't interested in impressing others, only God. He wasn't interested in personal gain, only God's, and for the benefit of others. He modeled the faith by investing his life (vv 8-9) in them. And it wasn't to demonstrate his power and total authority, though as church leader and founder, he had that right. (v 6b)

There are at least two ways to motivate people. The first is illustrated by the man who filled his pool with sharks and barracuda, and other assorted dangerous fish. At a party he announced to all of the guests that if anyone would jump in the pool

and swim to the other side, he would reward them with either a new mountain home, a world-wide trip, or a part of his business. As soon as he finished the words there was a splash, and a man swam quickly to the other end and hopped back out. The host was impressed. "Which prize do you want?" The man growled, "Right now, I just want to know who pushed me in." Reward, punishment, the force of push and pull...

Instead of that, [Paul and team] offered themselves familial-ly - as a family unit. They were among them like young children (v 6b-7a). Never a burden, almost always adding energy and joy and hope to the room.

They were like as a new mother caring for and loving her children. (vv 7b-8) Ladies, do you remember the delight of that labor (not the literal labor, but the work of raising your children? Working night and day to carry the burden so your young ones could be secure and learn and flourish, allowing them the opportunity to grow into responsible, beautiful, adults? Do you remember that as joy? Not always, but as stated in the theme, because of your love for them, you did it anyway...

They were like a father deals with his children (vv 11-12) encouraging, comforting, and urging them to live worthy of God. I asked the women, so I should ask the men too. Do you remember that joy? I'll just tell a story. Years ago, at Columbia University, Coach Lou Little watched a boy try out for his football team. He wasn't very good, but he had an incredible spirit. The coach put him on the team to fill only that role of the spark plug -- the sideline motivator. Occasionally this boy's father visited campus. Coach saw them walking together arm in arm and going to Chapel on Sunday. They clearly had an exceptional bond of love and faith. Long story shorter, the father died. When the son returned after the funeral, Coach asked if there was anything at all that he could do for him, he'd be happy to do it. The boy said, "Let me start in the game next Saturday." Coach was caught off guard. This was the biggest game of the season. But he was a man of his word. He figured he'd start him and leave him in for a few plays and then pull him out, because, after all, his true role was the sideline spark plug.

On the first play from scrimmage, the boy surprised *everyone* by making a tackle that threw the opposing team for a loss. He played inspired football play after play after play. He played so well that Coach left him in for the entire game. He was voted the game's most valuable player as he led the team to victory. Later, the coach asked him, "What got into you today to play like that?" The boy replied, "You saw me around campus with my father. What no one knew is that my father was blind. Today was the first time ever he actually got to see me play."

It is because we know Christ is watching us. We are his pride and joy, and in the game of life it allows us (when we are aware and confident that he is with us and watching) to "play above our heads" – to live an inspired life. Our motivation is always, first and foremost -- to please him, and modeling, as the text also says (v 10), * the holy life (that means set apart and committed to loving God and loving God's loving purposes, and * the righteous life (that means to accept and receive the right relationship with God that we can have through Christ, which will impact us to have a right relationships with others by living right and well), and also by modeling * and a blameless life (meaning you can't be legitimately accused of doing anything wrong), or at least, if we know we've done something wrong, we make it right, so that there is still no legitimate accusation. What kind of models are we? Do we model living for ourselves or living for Jesus?

*** Closing Hymn # 2149 1,R,2,4,R *Living for Jesus***

***Prayer:** Lord, we want to make the most of life by a relationship with Jesus. Not only for what he can do for us, but what he can do for others through us, bringing not only our lives, but all lives into a better place. This is a high calling you have placed on us, your people. We certainly cannot do it if you do not come to us in power and conviction and the Spirit. Even then, we fail. Forgive us by your grace, and grace us again to live fuller and more joyful lives than we have ever lived before -- for our lives are not our own -- but they are in you and we belong to you -- by the work of Jesus Christ who leads the way in our living by his living, among us, and in us. Amen.

There is one verse of this next song that emphasizes the content of this "Children of Light" Series. We will sing it as the beginning of our Closing Blessing, which I will then conclude with words.

*** 2175 v2 Together We Serve**

*** Closing Blessing**

Now as we leave, let us go with the assurance that God always goes with us and guides us toward his light. As his children, then; hold high the light of Christ -- be a beacon of hope to those around you -- that all may be drawn to him. Amen.