

“Celebrate: Confirmation”

(Scripture readings are in the sermon)

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A man arrives at heaven and asks Saint Peter if he could look up something. St. Peter says, “Of course. See this library it has all the answers to everyone’s questions. Here is your book of answers.” The man thanks Peter and begins reading. After awhile Peter hears the man exclaim, “Oh, now I understand.” Peter asks, “What did you learn?” “All my life I thought I heard God say be celibate instead God was saying celebrate.”

Augustine said, “The Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot!” Richard Foster said, “Celebration is at the heart of the way of Christ.” C. S. Lewis said, “Joy is the serious business of heaven.” Lewis Smedes said, “To miss out on joy is to miss out on the reason for your existence.” John Ortberg says, “Jesus came as the Joy-bringer. Joy is at the heart of God’s plan for human beings.”

Jesus entered our world on a high note of jubilation. The angel exclaimed, **Luke 2:10 “I bring you good news of a great joy which shall come to all people.”** Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming the year of Jubilee. Jesus delighted in sharing meals, playing with children and fishing. Jesus celebrated weddings, holidays and people. Jesus even performed miracles to provide wine, food and individual happiness. Jesus celebrated everything from faith as small as a mustard seed to the Passover. Before returning to heaven Jesus bestowed joy saying, **John 15:11 “These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”** Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ desire for you today and always is joyful celebration.

Perhaps we are also missing God’s command to celebrate. Paul wrote, **Philippians 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”** John Ortberg writes, “The Bible puts joy in the nonoptional category. Joy is a command. Joylessness is a serious sin, one that religious people are particularly prone to indulge in. Joylessness may be the sin most readily tolerated by the church.” There is a being in this universe who wants you to be serious, grim, judgmental, pessimistic, stern, but it is not God. Francis de Sales wrote, “The evil one is pleased with sadness and melancholy because he is sad ...hence he desires that everyone should be like himself.”

Happiness flows from circumstances. Joy is deeper and constantly poured into our heart by God. Celebration can be spontaneous however continual celebration is a spiritual practice, a learned skill. So how do we practice celebration?

Begin by taking responsibility for your joy. Your joy is not the responsibility of your friends, parent, spouse, kids, employer or church. Joyful celebration is your responsibility.

Practice celebration by beginning now. The psalmist declares **Psalms 118:24 “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”** It is tempting to say if only things could be like in the past, or if only this or that, or things will be better in the future, or once I graduate, get a great job, or whatever then I will rejoice. To often we live with the illusion that joy will come someday when conditions change. Instead scripture proclaims this day, with all its shortcomings, is a day to rejoice and be glad. This day, and everyday, is God’s day, God made it, Jesus is redeeming it. Everyday is to be celebrated.

Practice celebration by focusing on your blessings. Foster writes, “The decision to set the mind on the higher things of life is an act of the will. That is why celebration is a discipline. Celebration is the result of a consciously chosen way of thinking and living. When we choose this way, the healing and redemption in Christ will break into the inner recesses of our lives and

relationships and the inevitable result will be joy.” Paul put it this way, **Philippians 4:8 set your mind on all the things in life that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, lovely and gracious.** God has, is and will always fill our lives with blessings. God created and sustains a good creation. When we determine to dwell on the good in life we will be so aware of our blessings that joy will tend to swallow our problems. Celebration is an intentional choice.

Practice celebration by devoting time to acts of celebration. Relax, laugh and enjoy something that produces true joy for you and fills you with gratitude and delight for God. Eat your favorite food, listen to music that moves your soul, play a sport that invigorates you, read a book that refreshes your spirit, wear clothes that make you happy, surround yourself with beauty, play, dream, sing, dance.

Practice celebration by rejoicing in others. The church, world and all of us have a bright future due to the faithfulness of our confirmands. Celebrate their inspiring statements of faith, their commitment to the church, their unique gifts, their passion. Celebrate each one of them.

Practice celebration by being free of anxiety. The angel prefaced the good news of great joy for all people by saying, “fear not”. Paul follows “rejoice always” with have no anxiety about anything. This is much more than positive thinking, optimism, don’t worry be happy. Fear not because of the good news. Fear not for Jesus, is working in our lives and world, to forgive, restore and save us. The absence of fear does not come from favorable circumstances or a pious well ordered life rather it comes from trust that God is with you, working to redeem everything, to give us all and the world extreme makeovers.

Practice celebration with eschatological thinking. That is viewing all events in the light of the resurrection and the ultimate triumph of the risen Christ. Jesus was able to celebrate even when everything was going disastrously wrong because he trusted all would be redeemed in the end. Just moments before his betrayal Jesus celebrated the Lord’s Supper with his betrayer because he trusted in God to carry him and all people through death to eternal glorious life. Joy comes when we trust God to heal, renew and perfect everything from the simple ordinary details of our world to our own life. The joy that is in store for all of us is way, way beyond our imagination. The celebration will be grandeur than the joy between a lover and their beloved, than the mountains singing you songs, than the trees clapping for you. Celebrate for one day you will dance with God in heaven where you will be able to fully savor endless pure love and joy. Celebration brings joy into life and joy makes us strong. Scripture proclaims the **Nehemiah 8:10 “The joy of the Lord is our strength.” Amen.**

Soul Renewal

Spiritual practices for your extreme makeover

Celebrate is...

being joyful.

Practice celebration by...

- † taking responsibility for your joy.
- † rejoicing today and everyday.
- † giving your attention to good things and blessings.
- † an intentional choice to live joyfully.
- † devoting time to relax, enjoy and celebrate.
- † rejoicing in others and our confirmands: Ryan, Ellie, Courtney, Kendra, Rachael H., Rachael M..
- † being free of anxiety.
- † trusting God.
- † eschatological thinking that is viewing all events in the light of the resurrection and the ultimate triumph of the risen Christ.