

“Keeping Your Joy!”

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Wilkes-Barre, PA
Exodus 15:1-2
John 16:12-24*

After having dug to a depth of 10 feet last year, New York scientists found traces of copper wire dating back 100 years and came to the conclusion that their ancestors already had a telephone network more than 100 years ago.

Not to be outdone by the New Yorkers, in the weeks that followed in California, an archaeologist dug to a depth of 20 feet. Shortly after, headlines in the LA Times newspaper read: “California archaeologists have found traces of 200 year old copper wire and have concluded that their ancestors already had an advanced high-tech communications network a hundred years earlier than the New Yorkers.”

One week later, The Times Leader reported the following: “After digging as deep as 30 feet in his pasture near the Susquehanna River, Wilkes-Barre, PA, Bubba Mitchell, a self-taught archaeologist and graduate of Misericordia University, reported that he found absolutely nothing. Bubba has therefore concluded that 300 years ago, Pennsylvania had already gone wireless.”

I hoped you found it funny. I hoped you smiled, at least a little. Just a little?

We all need some joy in our lives! As much as possible actually. I know, many of the daily activities, at work, school, maybe even at home – can make it a bit difficult to be joyful – but joyful is our calling, our need!

This week a well known local personality, Manny Gordon, died at the age of 97. I met Manny 20 years ago when he was only 77. You know him from his inspirational message to our community “Enjoy, enjoy”

Enjoy. Enjoy.

Too many of us all too easily register our complaints. We dwell on the negative. We sink into despair. We consume only what denigrates the life that God has given us. We form the habit of “What’s the use?” “Life stinks and then you die!” (or something like that) is an all too popular mantra for our day and age.

And yet, this is not the way we have been created to live our lives. Joy, and its cognates appear 311 times in our Bible. Not an insignificant number. Time and time again – the people of the Bible are reminded to be joyful, to get hold of this elusive joy and hold on to it! This is the Christian way.

Paul in Romans declares that, “the Kingdom of God is NOT food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17). A little later he shares, that he wants our God of hope to “fill you with all joy and peace in believing...” (15:13)

Do you know what one of the fruits of the Spirit is? You guessed it! Joy! Along with peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Gal. 5:22)

II Timothy, recognizing life's problems and tears still, (in spite of such) declares, "be filled with joy!" (II Timothy 1:4)

James even has the temerity to declare that when you have problems, trials, hurts, disappointments, "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials," because how you come through the trial (in faith) will build up your life.

These are but a few – joyful examples from our guidebook – our Bible.

Ways of keeping your joy!

You all know about the early Hebrews' enslavement down in Egypt, many thousands of years ago. Making bricks without straw, day in and day out under the whip of Pharaoh's soldiers. The Hebrews had almost given up any hope of deliverance, of changing their lives. Moses shows up, through him – Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews gets them out of Egypt. The Exodus! You know the story, Chariots in pursuit – the Red Sea, walking on dry ground, chariots destroyed - Hebrews safe!!!

No more slaves!!
Free!!
Thank God!!

This is the Jewish epic story that remains alive today for many in the Western World and beyond! Freedom! Deliverance! Life! Joy!

Exodus 15 has all of Israel singing! They are now free, out of Egyptian oppression – free to choose their own destiny!

Who wouldn't sing!
I would!
Wouldn't you?

"I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously... and he has become my salvation!"

Glorious!
Wondrous!

But...not long after, not long after, their melodic voices change. From the Red Sea to Shore – ops – no water.

- And let the murmuring, complaining begin! Now at Elim. On to the wilderness of Sin -
- And let the complaining continue! "Would that we had died in Egypt, at least we had food. Look what you've done, brought us out there in the wilderness to kill us!" Then Manna is given.
- And let the complaining continue!!

And it does!! Time after time, after time!

In Israel's epic story of deliverance God did this and that, and this and that, freeing them to live their lives and yet so many complaints. Thank God, through Moses, they made it to the "Promised Land."

Are we so different? Beware of being bombarded by complaints. They will take a toll on your heart. I love the words of Jesus in John 16!

And this is where I want to take you! Don't allow complainers to harden your hearts, your souls. Reject the murmuring, complaining around you. Refuse to let it sink into your bones! Jesus is sharing that God's Spirit will never leave you alone, even in sorrow, in bad times. You will make it through. There are many "complaints" just waiting to harden your heart – to strip from you the child of God you are meant to be.

And here is the take home promise! Here is the belief to believe! No matter what complainers dish at you; no matter what negative, sorrows, hurts, disappointments are hurled at you; if you stand firm, if you choose, if you trust, ...No one will take your joy from you!

No one!

No one will take your joy from you.

Keeping your Joy!

Only you can give it away. And – Don't!! Don't!! Don't You Dare!

Find your joy! The Hebrews joy came back to them, when they remembered and sang. How much better is a joyful heart?! Memorize this phrase! Take it home, to work, to school, everywhere.

When you start to hear complaints keep you joy. Repeat to yourself (make it personal) –

“No one will take my joy from me. I'm keeping my joy!”

“No one will take my joy from me. I'm keeping my joy!”

Christianity is a way of life, a way of living. Choose this direction, this joy. It will change your life! It changed mine 42 years ago.

Take it home – Remember: “No one will take your joy from you!” Keep saying to yourself – “I'm keeping my joy!”

Amen