



Celebration

Session 1 – 17th September 2017

Bible Readings

Nehemiah 8:9-12

John 15: 9-17

Sermon Notes

(For the full sermon please go Online to listen
www.stmarysely.org)

I find that I am in danger of spending most of my life waiting to live rather than living! Preoccupied, self-obsessed. The very selfishness that keeps me from pouring myself out for the joy of others also keeps me from noticing and delighting in the myriad small gifts God offers each day.

But joy is at the heart of God. Genesis throbs with the refrain “God said,...And it was so.... and indeed, it was very good.” We will not understand God until we understand this about him: “God is the happiest being in the universe.” God also knows sorrow. Jesus is remembered, among other things, as “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” But the sorrow of God, like the anger of God, is his temporary response to a fallen world. That sorrow will be banished forever from his heart on the day the world is set right. Joy is God’s basic character. Joy is his eternal destiny.

“I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete,” says Jesus. You can become a joyful person. With God’s help, it really is possible. You may be joy-impaired. You may have to fight for it. But it can be done.

Times of feasting in the Old Testament were to be transforming experiences—just as times of meditating or fasting were. Gathering with people we love, eating and drinking, singing and dancing, while reflecting on the wonderful God who has given us such wonderful gifts.

When we celebrate, we exercise our ability to see and feel goodness in the simplest gifts of God.

But this raises a question. How can I embrace joy amid all the pain and suffering in the world? Often it is the people closest to suffering who have the most powerful joy. True joy, as it turns out, comes only to those who have devoted their lives to something greater than personal happiness. This is most visible in extraordinary lives, in saints and martyrs. But it is no less true for ordinary people like us.

“God will dwell with us; he will wipe every tear from our eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.”

Key Quotes

“The Practice of Celebration Joy is the serious business of heaven.” C. S. Lewis.

“To miss out on joy is to miss out on the reason for your existence.” Lewis Smedes.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” The Apostle Paul.

Discussion Questions

Tell about your last really joyful moment. What brought you joy? How did others know it? What are the outward signs that give you away?

What is one place in God’s creation that gives you a profound sense that God is a joyful God? When you are in this place, how is his joy passed on to you?

What are some of the unchangeable and eternal joy-gifts God has given you that no one can ever take away? How can these be a regular source of joy...even when times are tough?

John writes about people who have a unique ability to destroy joy. Without using any names, how have people like this impacted your life? What can we do to keep these people from robbing us of joy?

Impatience kills both joy and time. How have you seen impatience kill time in your life?

What kind of a picture of God were you given as a child growing up in your home or church? A joy-filled and embracing God or a joyless angry and harsh God. Elaborate.

What kind of a picture of God do you have today? A joy-filled and embracing God or a joyless angry and harsh God. Elaborate.

Prayer

What are some of the natural and joy-filled moments that occur in your week that you need to begin noticing and celebrating? Give thanks for them as they happen.

Sit down and remember then lift up specific prayers of thanks for the joy-giving gifts God has poured into your life.

Living the Life

Write a letter of thanks to a person who has been a joy-bringer in your life.

Consider turning off the TV and other screens for a week and take time to look for the small things in life that bring joy and share them with others.

Personal Reflection

“Here is a key for spiritual vitality: We must arrange life so that sin no longer looks good to us.” What might you rearrange in the coming week to make one specific area of temptation look less enticing?

“Often it is the people closest to suffering who have the most powerful joy.” Reflect on a person who has modeled this truth and what you have learned from his or her life.

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