

Sermon: Joyful, Joyful  
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24, John 1:14-18

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Advent 4, Joy, 12/24/17 10:30

### **1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

### **John 1:14-18**

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

## Sermon

### Home for the Holidays

An elderly man in Oklahoma calls his son in New York and says, "I hate to ruin your day son, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are getting a divorce; 45 years of marriage... and that much misery is enough!" "Dad, what are you talking about?" the son yells. "We can't stand the sight of each other any longer," the old dad explained. "We're sick of each other, and I'm sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Hong Kong and tell her!" Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. "Like heck they're getting divorces," she shouts, "I'll take care of this." She calls her elderly father immediately, and screams at him, "You are not getting divorced. Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing, you hear me?" she yelled as she hung up the phone.

The old man hangs up his phone and turns to his wife. "Okay", he says, "It's all set. They're both coming for Christmas and paying their own air-fare."

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This is the season of Joy, the days of happiness and hope, of family and stories, of forgiving one another in the little things and holding tight to the important things. This is the season of Joy, as children anticipate the coming of Santa and who share in the telling of Jesus' birth. A time where their smiles and uncontrolled movements are a reminder of what Joy truly is. This is the season of rejoicing, celebrating what has been - the year almost completely behind us, the awesome highs, and surviving the lows - the new year that is being born in front of us, with all the potential and possibilities, the events we are already planning for and the unexpected that we have come to expect in life. We reflect on the changes and we make resolutions to change again in the new year.

What has been the biggest joy of 2017? What is your greatest hope for 2018? This is the season of pondering and wishing and rejoicing.

This is also the season that we remember just who it is that we rejoice with, who we rejoice too. Not just family and friends and coworkers and neighbors, but also the one who is behind it all. We rejoice and pray without ceasing for we remember the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our calling to live in a new way.

In the midst of presents and travel, spending and eating, we remember that a new way of life is not a life style choice, but a way of life. A way of life that is passed down in story and everyday actions.

Dr. William Lynn Weaver is an african american who grew up in segregated Tennessee. He remembers his freshman year of College, coming home for Christmas break.

“I remember walking up the street Christmas Eve and I see this kid riding down the street on their bicycle and I say, ‘Boy, that looks like my brother’s bike.’ I get to the house and say, ‘Wayne, where’s your bike?’ And he said, ‘It was down on the steps.’ I said, ‘No it’s not. It’s gone.’

It’s a small neighborhood so we find out where the kid lives who has the bike and it’s a shack in an alley. Now, my brother and I, we’re going to beat this boy but my father was there and he said, ‘Just shut up and let me talk.’

So we knock on the door and this old black guy comes on a cane. The house was cold; the only light he had was a candle. It was his grandson who had stolen the bike, so he calls him out. He was the same age as my brother, about ten years old. The little boy starts crying and he says, ‘I just wanted something for Christmas.’ So we get the bike and we leave. We go back to my house.

My father tells my mother and she doesn’t say anything. She just starts cutting the turkey in half and all the fixings. She started packing it up. My father went to the coal yard and got a big bag of coal. And then he told my brother, he said, ‘You’ve got another bike, don’t you?’ My brother said, ‘Yeah...’

So we went back with food, coal — so they’d have some heat — and the bike. The little boy is just crying but the thing that moved me the most was the old man. My father gave him \$20, which was a huge deal back then, and said, ‘Merry Christmas.’ He said, ‘Thank you,’ and then just broke down in tears.

My father was a chauffeur; my mother was a domestic, so we didn’t have a lot of stuff. And that Christmas, I don’t even remember what gift I got but I do know that made me feel better than any Christmas I’ve ever had.

Joyful, joyful, we adore thee. God of glory, Lord of love. Love enters in. Love becomes Word and Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. Love becomes just like you and just like me, limited by time and space, by strength and desires, yet incarnate love that changes everything. Love meets us where we are, in our false ideologies or are broken despair, in our aging body or new found life - love meets us where we are, and calls us to have this love for one another.

Who is God calling you to love today, this week, in the new year? How will you meet that person where they are and how will you share your love so that it can be real, so that others might rejoice. Friends, rejoice without ceasing, for love is made flesh, full of grace and truth. Thanks be to God Amen

