

**ADVENT 3 2009: CREATE CHRISTMAS SERIES #3**  
**1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

**CREATE JOY**

**SCRIPTURE LESSON INTRO:**

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians was written sometime around 50 A.D. -- which makes it the oldest book of the New Testament. It was written to a church that Paul had founded on his second missionary trip.

You can read in Acts 17 that in spite of being chased out of the town -- Paul had a deep and abiding love for the followers who had responded to his preaching and had become Christians.

And although he wanted to visit them and check on them -- he was unable. So, instead, he sent Timothy -- who brought back a report about the church.

This letter is Paul's acknowledgement to them of Timothy's very positive visit. Our lesson comes from the conclusion of this letter.

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

**REJOICE ALWAYS! REALLY?**

This has got to be one of the most challenging directives in all of the letters of Paul:

***"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing,  
give thanks in all circumstances."***

And just in case anyone might think this is just Paul's opinion, he goes on to say...

***"...for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."***

**Joy seems to be a pretty hard commodity to come by these days.**

The stock market may be slowing recovering -- and the Great Recession has been declared "over." But people are still losing jobs...others continue to look for employment after months of searching...houses continued to be foreclosed...children are sold into slavery and murdered...wars continue to be waged, and soldiers are deployed right in the middle of the holiday season...

...I could go on and on.

**But then...Paul could have gone on and on, too.**

Things weren't all that much different in the world during the time of the Roman Empire. Of course the actual circumstances were unique to that period of history -- but the encouragement of Paul to stay joyfully positive in spite of everything must have seemed every bit as idealistic, and perhaps even unrealistic then as it does now.

And yet -- maybe because things *are* so tough these days -- people are looking for things that bring just a little bit of joy into their lives. And people look for joy in all kinds of places...

Did you know that the most viewed video clip on the Internet is "The Evolution of Dance"?

This 6 minute clip of a comedian dancing to various sound clips has been viewed over 129 million times! It's just a clip of a man acting silly in a way that makes viewers remember their own musical and dance histories with a smile and a chuckle.

Last year, the most watched video was a live stream of three Shiba Inu puppies -- which for most of the time were sleeping. It had been viewed more than 15 million times for a combined total of 800 viewer years!

Now think about it -- the most watched internet video is of a man dancing to a comedic routine and puppies sleeping.

Interesting... I wonder what the next most watched video will be?

**Well, as far as the Bible is considered -- people are to look to God for joy.** But the big problem in that is that God expects the people of faith -- the followers of Christ -- like us: you and me -- to be the ones who make that joy apparent...who convey it...and in many ways **create it** -- not just consume it.

The word of the angel to the shepherds abiding in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night in a field near Bethlehem was clear:

"I am bring you good news of **great joy** for all the people..."

And so many of our favorite Christmas carols recall the continuing joy of that event:

*Good Christian friends, rejoice, with heart and soul and voice...*

*O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant...*

*Hark! the herald angels sing, glory to the new born king,*

*Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.*

*Joyful all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies...*

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come...*

**(now back to our regularly scheduled sermon)**

**God's gift of joy to us the abiding presence of Jesus -- who said in his final words on earth: "I am with you, always."**

That is the true source of our joy in this world, and the reality that compels us to walk confidently and hopefully through life.

And one of the most important things we do as Christians is to convey that joy to others. It is probably the most effective way in which we reach those who do not know God.

### **The Source of our Power to Create Joy:**

Creating joy requires a certain kind of power...

...and to help you remember it, I want you to think about a battery.

### **Do you know what the most popular battery is?**

When I was a kid, it was the big "D" battery -- remember?

But **today, the most sold batteries in the world are double "A's".**

I don't know about you -- but I have a junk drawer back at the parsonage -- in fact, I have two -- in the kitchen. And I have batteries in them. I have an assortment. I have the big D batteries, some C's, a few 9-volt batteries, and in the cabinet underneath the drawers, I even have a couple of those large lantern ones for hurricane season.

But do you know the ones I am always in need of -- and so often out of? Yep -- the AA's!

**Now...I want you to think about this as we think about creating joy:**

The world is often in need of, and out of, JOY.

And you and I are God's "AA's"...

...and those double "A's" are: **ATTITUDE and ACTION.**

## **ATTITUDE**

What Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 is about the **attitude** we are called to have as believers in Jesus Christ. It is a positive attitude of joyful reliance upon and trust in God:

*"rejoice always"*

*"pray constantly"*

*"give thanks unconditionally"*

**The ability to rejoice always is predicated on praying and trusting** (*which is what giving thanks unconditionally is all about*).

Now, constant prayer does not mean that we are called to be on our knees every waking hour. It means that we are to cultivate a sense of the presence of God in a way that does not position God "way up there" or simply watching us "from a distance" --  
-- but that sense that God is right here.

And prayer is not always a head bowed, eyes closed meditative exercise. *Praying* is a religious way of describing the way we build a personal relationship with an unseen God.

**To pray constantly is to be working on that relationship all the time.**

I have a couple of friends who are married to each other. And I have told them that I think they have the best marriage that I've had the pleasure to observe up close.

They are constantly communicating with each other -- sometimes, perhaps, even to the extreme to others. They call each other to let each other know where they are -- what they're doing. They are truly each other's best friend. They enjoy being in each other's company.

And so when they face difficult times -- they have been able to depend on one another, and trust that they will see things through together.

**Now...for us single folks...**the same can hold true for our relationships. If not as intimate -- close and true friends are those with whom we stay in constant touch. Cultivating friendships that go beyond superficial bonds of work and shared activities taking being present in each other's lives -- through the good and difficult times.

It is easy for husbands and wives, and close friends to be present for each other because we can see each other, hear each other, and touch each other.

**We can't do that with God...**so we find other ways to build that relationship. One of those ways is **prayer.**

Now, I do a whole lot of relationship building with God in the shower -- as I start my day.... Or in the car... Or other times in the midst of the day.

See -- I'm not real good at being present with God at bedtime. I tend to fall asleep on God.

But just like my friend wouldn't ignore his wife all day, or weeks on end -- and then expect her to be right there when he needed her....

I will not ignore God for days and weeks on end, and then expect him to be there with me at the snap of my fingers.

*(Although because of his grace-filled love, he would be!)*

**Constant prayer means claiming the real presence of God with us.**

And because God is with us, as Jesus Christ, the Son of God, promised...there is no circumstance we ever face where we are alone and without hope.

**And for that reason, we can give thanks in all circumstances.**

Now... take note that Paul does not tell us to give thank ***for*** all circumstances, but ***in*** all circumstances.

It certainly is true that there is always something for which you can find thanks -- even in the most

awful of circumstances...

...But, fundamentally, our greatest thanks is that we are never alone. God is with us.

The biblical word for that is "Emmanuel." And Emmanuel in the flesh is the One whose birth brings great joy.

**ACTION:**

When you and I exhibit the attitudes of contentment, peace, and trust in *no matter what* -- it comes across as joy, deep joy, to others. And that's where the other "A" comes in: **ACTION.**

If we look back just two verses before where we began reading today, we find Paul writes:

***"And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the elders,  
encourage the faint hearted,  
help the weak,  
be patient with all of them.  
See that none of you repays evil for evil,  
but always seek to do good to one another, and to all"***

*(1 Thess. 5:14-15)*

Mark Twain once wrote:

***"To get the full value of joy,  
you must have someone to divide it with."***

**We create joy for others by our attitude, but we also create joy by our deliberate actions.**

This past summer, a group of our youth spent a week putting their faith into action. Those of us who were here to see the slide show they presented during worship could see the joy on their faces -- AND the joy on the face of the man for whom they built a ramp so he could get out of his house.

With contributions from UMW and members of the congregation, the youth group refurbished luggage and provided personal necessities for women and children of the Women's Shelter. And while we cannot see first-hand the joy on the faces of those who receive the gifts -- we heard stories from

the director of the program.

The Knit-Wits have created joy in the lives of others through the Prayer Shawl ministry -- as they prayed over the shawls -- as the shawls were received by individuals in all circumstances (both happy and sad) -- and those persons felt through the warmth of those blankets the warm love and presence of God.

Members of this congregation work out in and among the people of our community -- in many ways -- some through their jobs -- others through volunteer organizations -- still others "just do it". The joy they have in Christ compels them to share that joy with others in ways that make the "Good News of Jesus Christ" truly life-transforming for others -- and in return their joy is increased in greater measure.

One of the simple lessons many of us learned in Sunday School, years ago, was that the key to joy was **J O Y = *Jesus, Others, and You.***"

**In that order...**

And to that, we add today -- a little battery reminder -- the "AA"....

And you **create joy** by your **attitude and** your **actions.**

And the best thing about that is....because Jesus, himself, is the source of the power....you will never run out.....

You'll "keep going, and going, and going, and going...."