

## **Sermon Sunday - 3 Jan 2021**

Good Morning in the name of Jesus

Today is our first service of the year and we would have been celebrating Communion. How sad we can't do it. This pandemic has come back with a great vengeance. It seems to be more frightening than before. One of my colleagues in Louis Trichardt tells me they have had a 400% increase in cases over 10 days. We who fall into the Waterberg District are now a hotspot and so have to be more vigilant than ever. I have heard of one hospital in Pretoria that is nursing patients in a tent as they have no more beds. Wendy and Yvonne Hall have both contracted Covid.

The Bishop convened a zoom meeting with the clergy and it has been decided that all Methodist Churches will be closed till the end of January and then a decision will be taken about the reopening. This means all church organisations such Bible Studies, WA, Guilds YMG etc. are all closed as well. Please let us stay on our knees as we think of the front line workers and all who have contracted the virus and all those who have lost loved ones during this time.

Wendy And I would like to wish you all a very Happy and Blessed New Year.

**Joy.**

**Jeremiah 31:7-14**

Even though we have been through a very difficult year, a year of pain, a year of sadness, a year of uncertainty, a year of nothingness, we have got to think of the goodness of God in the past and praise Him for it, the Bible says, "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; His loving kindness is everlasting."

Each of us experience the natural season of winter, spring, summer and autumn. We also experience these seasons in our spiritual lives. This year has probably been winter for most of us. We will have many seasons on our spiritual journey through life. The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes reminds us that every season of life has a purpose.

Through this past year of much sadness, I would like us to see there is still a season of joy. It is something we all long for. Joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit produced by God in us. Experiencing Joy should be part of every season in a Christians life. Joy comes when we are aware of God grace.

The prophet Nehemiah said "the joy of the Lord is our strength". When Jesus was born the angels announced "good tidings of great joy."

If you are a Christian, a follower of Jesus then you would have experienced the good tidings of joy that he has brought into your life. The joy of knowing that Jesus died

for you. The joy of knowing your place in heaven is assured. The joy of knowing your sins have been forgiven. The joy of knowing that you are in a relationship with God who loves and cares for you and has a plan for your life. The joy of knowing the Holy Spirit lives in you. Just knowing that Jesus brings joy into our daily lives no matter the circumstances we find ourselves in.

Listen to Jesus' words "I Have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with joy. Yes your joy will overflow.

In many of Jesus' miracles, there is joy for eg. There is the parable of the lost sheep. Parable of the lost coin and the parable of the lost son, these parables end with a joyful shepherd, a joyful woman and a joyful father.

There is so much joy in heaven when one sinner repents.

Paul often wrote about Joy, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit". His words to the Philippian church were "Always be full of joy in the Lord."

It's not just Paul who wrote about Joy. Peter said the following, "So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold – though your faith is far more precious than mere gold."

So when your faith remains through many trials, it will bring you praise, glory and honour on the day when Jesus is revealed to the whole world. You love Him even though you have not seen Him. The reward for trusting Him will be the salvation of your soul.

Is the joy of the Lord your strength in the season you are in?

If you know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour then whatever season you are in right now, the joy of the Lord should be in your heart. Maybe you are in a difficult season of your life, maybe your situation or circumstances are difficult. Maybe you are concentrating on a problem you feel has no solution and so can't experience the joy of the Lord. Think about Paul and Silas when they were locked up in a Philippian prison. They had been arrested without reason, they had been beaten without a trial. Humanly speaking they were in a joyless situation yet at midnight they sang praises to God. Then a miracle happened there was an earthquake all the doors opened and their chains fell off. There must have been great joy.

Let's think of Peter and the Apostles who had been brought before the High Priest and the Sadducees who had, had them flogged. The Apostles were released with the

condition never to preach in the name of Jesus ever again. What a joyless situation this was. In Acts we read, “the Apostles left rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. And everyday, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: Jesus is the Messiah.”

How could the Apostles rejoice and have joy in these situations. They were following the example of Jesus, because of the joy awaiting Him, He endured the cross, disregarding the shame.

Even the most spiritually mature of God's people can experience periods of joylessness. Job wished he had never been born. David prayed that he could to place where he did not have to deal with reality. Elijah after have seen 450 prophets of Baal defeated, fled into the desert and asked to die. If these great men of God struggled with finding joy in their situations, we might find ourselves in a time of joylessness. For us to experience joy in difficult circumstances we need to focus on God. Peter tells us to “Cast all you anxieties on him because he cares for you.”

How can we find joy in every season of our lives. In Philippians, Paul gives some practical guidelines to experience joy. 'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Paul emphasises the importance of praising God and remembering that God is always near in every season of our life. We are to pray and focus on the things of God. We will experience joy when we bring our praise and worship to God. We will experience joy when we talk to God through prayer. We will experience joy when we walk by faith and keep our focus on the things of God.

As we persevere through trials, with Gods help our faith will strengthen and mature. By God's grace we can experience joy despite our circumstances. James says, “Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing”

I want to close with the words from Romans, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

