

Philippians 4:4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Luke 2:41-52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

“The Temple at Johnson’s Corner”

Rev. David Dalke

June 26, 2011

Many thanks to you folks, by the way. You need to have more celebrations around here. So then you can come over here and celebrate with us. We knew that you were just going to be right on with us today and so we do have a quartet here at the church, and we thought we'd better practice, so yesterday we had a practice while they were practicing, and when we finished, we walked. Michael said, "So you preach tomorrow" and I said, "I do." He said, "Well, we're going to pray for you to be right on and short." To which Craig said, "And not necessarily in that order."

Well, I'll tell you, this man's name was Fred, and he was 84 years old, and he reminded me a lot of the gentleman that was on the front page of our paper this week, Earl Williams, who retired out of Arby's after scrubbing down tables and setting chairs and welcoming people for a long time. Fred worked in a clothing store. He'd worked in the Spines clothing store and he sold men's accessories on Douglas Avenue, and he would take a tie out of the case, like this, and he would make that tie live. He'd hook it around

his spindly little fingers, 84 years old, and he's hold it up and he'd say, "You would look wonderful in this," and then he would take a hat. There were all kind of hats on glass counters, some of you remember them, and the hats would sit there like this, and he would pull out a hat, and he would hand it to the person. He'd cradle it just like a newborn baby, he'd just care for it, so precious, and he'd take it and he'd turn it around, and then he would do like this, and he would hand it to them, like that. I asked him one day, "Fred, every time you show a hat, you always turn it upside down when you hand it to them. Why do you do that?" And he said, "Because the inside is the most beautiful part of the hat. The inside."

Now, that's what Mary discovered. Mary knew that all along. Mary was in high school. Mary sat in a small group. We were doing a thing about self-esteem and self-image, and self-awareness, and she sat there. I said, "Pick out some kind of a creature, some kind of a created creature that's not human, and tell us if you're most like that creature. She chose a snake, and she said, "I'm kind of like a snake, because on the outside, a snake is really very scary. Most snakes are scary, but on the inside, some snakes are very very good." Mary was kind of an alternative-looking person. Her hair was different, she dressed differently, and she said, "I'm like a snake, but some snakes inside are very good. Some of them eat some of the insects in the garden, and protect the vegetables, so some snakes are good, but I don't think, "she said, "you know that about me. Because all you see is the outside."

I think that's what Paul was talking about. When Paul wrote that letter to those people in Philippi, he was saying to them, "I know you're sort of a fledgling church, you're not a big church." Philippi was not a big place. The first convert in Philippi was a woman, and she started having people meet in her home, and they started to grow. And he knew, he knew he needed to bolster them, to help them, to create in them this little band of Christians, that they wanted to survive together, and so he started out ... Paul's in prison, so he sends his letter by messenger. It starts out and says, "Rejoice, rejoice in the Lord," and he says, "And look inside of each other. Treat each other with kindness and look inside and find the love part of each other, and find the beauty inside of yourselves, and treat each other that way. Don't just look outside at the shell," he said, "You've got to survive together and crawl inside each other." He said, "Don't get into any cliques. Do not get into cliques," he said. "Cliques can be dangerous."

I think Paul must have known that the best of friends are oftentimes two people who dislike the same person. He said, don't get into cliques. Find the kindness and the love inside of each other. You see, Paul's letter to the people in Philippi was not a theological treatise at all. Paul's letter was a heart-felt letter of concern and passion on how they saw one another, and treated each other.

Well, it was seventeen years ago. Cheryl and I were sitting on a train. There's a little train, I mean it was really tiny, it was one of those that goes around the animal park in San Diego. And we're sitting there going around, we had two grandchildren at the time, age five and three, and we're looking at elephants and giraffes and lions. She said, "Wouldn't it be fun to have the grandkids with us and looking at all of this?" I said, "Oh,

yeah, that would be great." Then I said, "I wonder at what age do you think we could take a grandchild and have them spend four or five days with us just alone, away from their parents?" She said, "Well, let's ask Julie" (the mom) "and let her consult with us about that." So we said, "Julie, what's a good age to have grandkids with us for four or five days?" and she said, "How about now?" She said that at least two or three times, if I'm not mistaken. And then she said, "I think age six. Six years old, they're going to school, it's a passage in their life, they're kind of independent. They know what they want, for the most part. They're making new friends. Full day at school. I think when they turn six, that's a wonderful time for grandparents to have them for four or five days."

And about that time, the six-year-old trip was born, and all eight of the grandkids have each had a six-year-old trip. Then we have been to every kid-friendly city you can think of. Each one by themselves, we'd pick them up in the car. They set up their little palace in the back seat. They string things from one end to the other, and they clip stuff, and one of us rides back with them, and they play games and the other one drives. We go to these kid-friendly cities like Chicago. Well, they've got museums. And we'd go to St. Louis, and Kansas City, and Denver. And in those cities we'd find not only these wonderful museums to go to, but we'd find kid-friendly restaurants, that serve food just for them, and we'd find motels that have swimming pools that stay open late at night. You'll notice all of those cities also have major league ball parks. And so there's an ashtray full of coin, and they can get in that and dig out whatever they want. It's a time to indulge them, but it's more than that. It's a time to sit there and listen, and to find out what makes a six-year-old tick, in this day and age. I don't remember. My day was different, and so was yours. This is theirs. And we listen and we laugh, we just have more fun, but we learn what's beneath the skin, what's inside.

I remember we picked Christopher up, he was the first one. Picked him up in Michigan. As he walked out of the house his parents said, "Now, Christopher, no more Happy Meals, Christopher. You had enough of those, no more of those. You eat good food with Grandpa and Grandma, okay?" "All right." We had a great week, and as we returned him I remember saying, "Now, Christopher, when you go in the house, please, let's just leave the Happy Meal stuff out of all this, all right?" He walked in the house and the first think out of his mouth was, "Well, I had eleven Happy Meals."

And so did those people in Jerusalem. They sure did, because that was the Passover. They were having all kind of happy meals. They spent a week together. They shared food, they talked about that event of the Old Testament. They had a great time together. They renewed acquaintances. People came from all the villages around. They renewed relationships. It was a wonderful time. And now it was over, and they needed to go home, each to their own village. And Mary and Joseph started toward Nazareth and they said, "You know what? I think Jesus has to be up there somewhere. He's not with us, he's with his friends. He's probably walking half a mile ahead of us, but he's with some people." They walked a full day and then they realized maybe he isn't up there. Where is he? And they turn around and walk a full day back to Jerusalem, if you can imagine. And when they get back there, they look for three solid days for him. He's twelve years old, but they still look.

You know folks, I think if we were searching for three days for one of our kids, we'd have signs and posters and flyers handed out, we'd have a picture of Jesus, and we'd put it in on a wall, and we'd put it in the cafes, and we'd put it in all the buildings, We'd go and hand them out. And then all of a sudden they came to the temple, and there he was. He was in the temple, and he was listening and talking, and listening, with a group of people that must have been talking maybe theology, maybe philosophy, maybe Old Testament, maybe just life's circumstances. They were just talking with each other, and he was listening and sharing his life. They were crawling inside each other. They were getting beneath the shells they called their bodies, and they were into feelings and thoughts. It had been a wonderful experience there. It was Passover, and he didn't want it to end, and they're still talking. And all of a sudden, Mary looks at him and says, "Jesus, what are you doing? We have been looking all over for you," and I kind of sense, and I don't have the slightest idea whether this is true, but it seems a little bit like it was a little sarcastic response - "Well, why would you look for me, I've been about my father's business, which is loving people, and caring for people." And then they said, "We have to go home. We have to go to Nazareth now, it's over. It's a long way, sixty miles, we've got to walk." And so they left, and the Scripture tells us that we never heard much about Jesus after that, until he was 30. Except that he grew in wisdom. He grew in wisdom.

Well, you know, we shared some time in a temple. We shared some time in a temple with a couple other twelve-year-olds. Because you see, out of the six-year-old trip grew the middle school trip, and now each child, all but one, seven of them have come to us, sometimes in pairs, because cousins turn 12, sometimes, at the same time. They come on our turf, and they sit with us, and we plan, and we talk. It's another passage. Think about it. Six is a passage, turning 12, 13 is a passage. Middle school, your body's changing, your mind thinks a little differently, your feelings kind of get all messed up a little bit, you don't know where you are with friends. It's a special time to spend together for another four or five days.

And sometime we do just kind of crazy things, I mean kind of crazy, like this year, Abigail or Abby and Victoria or Torie came to be with us at the same time, and we chose up teams, and we went on a scavenger hunt at midnight at Walmart. Yeah, a scavenger hunt at midnight at Walmart, can you think of anything more fun? We all put lists together, you've got to find all that stuff in that store, see who can meet back at the vegetable counter first. Grabbed our baskets and away we went. Torie and I got nosed out by a basket. And then we switched teams to see who could put the stuff back.

It was now like 1:30, and we bought a couple items there, because we felt so guilty about what we'd been doing at that store and to that store. We walked outside and we're standing there, and one of them says to us, "I'm hungry, I'm hungry." And I said, "Well, so am I," and we said, "Where shall we eat?" There was only one place, in the middle of the night, to go eat. Johnson's Corner, and we drove to Johnson's Corner, and we walked in at 2:00, and we sat there like it was a temple. A temple, at the feet of two 12-year-olds. We sat there amongst the truck drivers, we sat there amongst the weary travelers that had stopped for a cup of coffee so they could keep going. We sat there with some

kind of loud teenagers that were having fun on their dates, and stopped to get something to eat. We just sat there in that temple at the feet of those two 12-year-olds and we talked about life. We talked about what it's like to be 12, what it's like to grow up in this day and age, because I will never understand that. I do not know what it's like to be 12 in this day and age. And we laughed, and we cried just a little bit, and we shared, and we got inside the skin of each of us. And then it was time to leave, after eating our one cinnamon roll for all of us, and some scrambled eggs, and as we started to get up, one of the girls looked at us and said, "I can't believe we're talking like this at 3 o'clock in the morning."

But Mattie Stepanak understood. You know, many of you know Mattie. Mattie Stepanak, born some years ago with a rare form of muscular dystrophy, confined to a wheelchair and a breathing tube, others in his family also had that rare form. And when his brother died around him, Mattie was three and he wrote a story about his brother, published it. Mattie was one that believed we should play after the storm, play after the storm he said. Mattie was also one who believed in peace. He appeared on Capitol Hill as a young boy, and he said peace is possible. And then it came time for Mattie's 12-year-old trip. It was a different trip than any of us have ever taken or had taken up to this point in our lives, because Mattie's 12, 13 year old trip was when his life ended. And as would lay there on his bed gasping for air, he said "Have I done enough? Have I done enough?" And then he said something else. He said something that I think Mary understood when she said "I'm kind of like a snake, they're also very good on the inside, but many of you don't know that about me, because all you see is the outside." Mattie understood that, as he would plead for people to accept disabilities and love people like they are inside. I think Mattie understood what Paul meant when he went to Philippi and he talked to those people and said, "You've got to look inside your souls, get beneath your skin, support, trust, care, love each other." I think Mattie understood what Jesus was all about when he was talking in the temple with all those folks and sharing about life. I really think Mattie understood what Fred meant when he would take the hats out of the case and turn it over. He turn it over and say "There it is, the inside." Because Mattie said, "Life is really found inside of us. That's where the beauty is." As we found out early in the morning, in the temple at the feet of two 12-year-olds at Johnson's Corner. Amen.