

Sermon for May 9, 2021 by Pastor Gerry "Count it ALL as JOY - Seeking and Sustaining Community" Ser21-16
Philippians 4:4-7; John 15:9-17 5-9-21 TUCC last Sunday

I love the writings by the French Jesuit Priest/philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. I am not showing off. I have spent the past 30 years trying to understand a little of the writings of de Chardin. (how to pronounce) When I was in the US Peace Corps in the Philippines in 1964-65, I spent lots of time with a group of Jesuit priests, one, Father Michael Shey, tried to mentor me on de Chardin's writings. Somewhat in desperation, Fr Shey said "Gerry, this is de Chardin's core believe: "Joy is the one infallible sign of the presence of God." Then Fr. Shey added this: "True joy does not have to do with outward circumstances. It has to do with the interior knowing of the love of God and abiding in that love. Abiding – living *in* that love and living *out of* that love."

What did St. Paul write to the church at Philippi?: "Rejoice in the Lord always," (and this, by the way, when he was in prison about to be dragged off in chains and killed.) Rejoice in the Lord always, and give thanks in all circumstances. Normally, we don't handle this sort of challenge real well (I don't). And this morning, of all the mornings, in our life together, I am preaching to you about being joyful: If not joyful for today. JOYFUL for the Call God has placed upon your lives and on your new Pastor, Jessic Townsley.

We've accomplished a lot together in these past three years. I would suggest to you that You're ready for the next exciting phase of your life as a congregation. I'm sad to be leaving you and at the same time ready to move on to new things in my life...to a retirement that no one (friends and family alike) ever thought would happen. Our shared ministry has come to an end,, to a joyful conclusion. Even so, there's mixed emotions his morning...(glad the interim's almost over...nice to get a pastor with normal hair...etc.) even so, let's count it all as joy.

But let us be realistic and real here this morning. There is much joy today for all that we have shared with each other, and it's precisely because of all

that joy that there is sadness. I know that I feel both of those emotions way deep down in my very being. That's as it ought to be, for you see, my friends, "One of the great paradoxes is that we can actually experience joy and sorrow at the same time."

John Ortberg writes about it in *Dangers, Toils and Snares: Resisting the Hidden Temptations of Ministry*:

When we take our children to the shrine of the Golden Arches, they always lust for the meal that comes with a cheap little prize, a combination christened in a moment of marketing genius, the Happy Meal. You're not just buying fries, McNuggets, and a dinosaur stamp; you're buying happiness. Their advertisements have convinced children they have a little McDonald-shaped vacuum in their souls: 'Our hearts are restless till they find their rest in a happy meal.' I try to buy off the kids sometimes. I tell them to order only the food and I'll give them a quarter to buy a little toy on their own. But the cry goes up, 'I want a happy meal.' All over the restaurant, people crane their necks to look at the tightfisted, penny-pinching cheapskate of a parent who would deny a child the meal of great joy. The problem with the happy meal is that the happy wears off, and they need a new fix. No child discovers lasting happiness in just one: 'Remember that Happy Meal? What great joy I found there!' Happy meals bring happiness only to McDonalds. You ever wonder why Ronald McDonald wears that grin? 220 million Happy Meals sold each year, 602,000 daily with nearly \$3 billion in annual sales... that's why McDonalds calls them happy meals. When you get older, you don't get any smarter; your happy meals just get more expensive.

Of course we know that things can't buy happiness, can't give us joy.

I would submit to you that not even Interim pastors can buy you or assure happiness in the church...you have been blessed in the past by strong

pastors...and then burdened at times by difficult called pastorates...In these past years, and especially in this past year you have come to terms with all that and are poised, indeed ready, more than ready to enjoy a future with energy, inspiration and hope that your future will be strong and fruitful and faithful.

But I do believe that our two texts this morning...Acts 2:42-47 and the gospel text from John 10:1-10 are strong statements of what brings us joy....real, authentic and lasting joy....and that is what you have....here at TUCC: a sense of community...a people committed to community-- of love and healing that has evolved out of the gifts of those who came before you and a sense of community that keeps you faithful to those who will come after you.

Steve Green, by now an aging pop Christian singer has a powerful song that speaks to us today. "Find Us Faithful". It goes like this: We're pilgrims on the journey Of the narrow road And those who've gone before us line the way Cheering on the faithful, encouraging the weary Their lives a stirring testament to God's sustaining grace Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses Let us run the race not only for the prize But as those who've gone before us Let us leave to those behind us The heritage of faithfulness passed on through godly lives

CHORUS:

Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful
 May the fire of our devotion light their way
 May the footprints that we leave
 Lead them to believe
 And the lives we live inspire them ...to obey

Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful

Steve Green's song is Reminiscent of a few verses from the 3rd chapter of Philippians: 12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached

the goal;* but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Beloved,* I do not consider that I have made it my own;* but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly* call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵

There is a legacy here of a ministry and a mission grounded in faith. There is challenge here that compels you and all the people of Trinity Church to grow the future, and to grow into the future to which God is undoubtedly calling you in these days. Let me close with these words from Archbishop Oscar Romero, Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero ~ (murdered on March 24, 1980 in El Salvador – assassinated by conducting mass. Prophets of a

Future Not Our Own

This is what we are about:

We plant seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results,

but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders,

ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

So, THIS IS my prayer, my hope, my greatest desire for you, the people of Tucc; “Joy is the one infallible sign of the presence of God.” And in that joy, you will continue to find the strong sense of community to which God calls you. Indeed, May it be so each one of you and all of you. Amen.