



September 2015 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ –

I thank my God every time I remember you... (Philippians 1:3).

This year I am inviting you to reflect on portions of Paul's letter, *to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi (1:1b)*, as you gather for church council, adult study, youth group, coffee group and are engaged in learning, discernment and reflection together. Relying heavily on the writings of Fred Craddock and of David Lose, each article will include a brief reflection on a Scripture passage, questions for reflection and discussion, and a prayer. I encourage you, as we begin, to read Paul's letter in its entirety in one sitting; remembering as you read that this is a letter – of Paul – to a church.

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Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Philippians 4:4

What does it mean to rejoice? Really? We may say that word all the time...at least in church. And we've read it here in Paul's letter numerous times already. But what does it mean, really?

In brief, rejoicing is simply to take joy in something, or to be more precise, to rejoice is to experience and express delight. Both of those verbs matter. It is one thing to experience delight, to be aware, that is, of something bringing you delight, joy, pleasure or contentment. That's important. But expressing it matters too. It matters a great deal, actually, because expressing our delight helps us not only become more aware of it but also to share this experience with others. Expressing it, that is, often multiplies its benefit. So it's one thing to experience delight – which is great – and it's another to express delight – that's even better.

But notice that Paul doesn't only say rejoice, he says "rejoice in the Lord." What does he mean? Simply that in this relationship there is the potential to experience faith, hope, love, contentment, confidence, courage, and more. And as we notice these things – that prayer brings a sense of confidence and contentment, that singing a hymn raises our spirits, that reading Scripture may strengthen our faith and grant us courage to face the challenges ahead – we also discover ways to give them voice. And as we voice these things, they grow.

So delight in the gifts you receive from God's relationship with you...*and* express them. Give thanks for what is beautiful and hard and challenging and hopeful in your life and in your life of faith and see what happens.

Or, as Paul says, "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say it, Rejoice!*"

Read and Reflect: Philippians 4:4

Discuss and Reflect:

What in this reading leads you to say, “I wonder about...”, or, “I noticed...”

Comment on the following: *rejoicing is simply to take joy in something, or to be more precise, to rejoice is to experience and express delight. Both of those verbs matter.*

Comment on the following: *Paul doesn't only say rejoice, he says “rejoice in the Lord.” What does he mean?*

Share together the gifts you receive from God and from one another. Express them. Give thanks. Rejoice.

Pray together: *Gracious God, help us not just to notice the blessings of this life and our life with you, but also to name them, give thanks for them, share them with others, and see them multiply. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen (Philippians 4:23).

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

In Christ Jesus –
Shalom,
+Larry

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Spirit -Led Leadership - Hope-Filled Discipleship - Innovative Tradition - Collaborative Partnerships