

## Generated for Joy

We've been talking about God's purposes for our lives. We now know we are wired to worship God, formed for fellowship with Him and with one another, designed for discipleship which is the process of becoming like Jesus, selected for servanthood, and made for the mission of sharing Christ with all the world.

Last Sunday I hinted that I might have one more purpose to share with you. I knew what it was then, but I had a problem. You see, the word is "Joy," and the problem is the "J." How many verbs begin with a "J?" I'm somewhat obsessive compulsive when it comes to being consistent with my sermon titles in a series. Wired for Worship, Formed for Fellowship, Designed for Discipleship, Selected for Servanthood, and Made for a Mission all work really well, but what in the world am I to do with "Joy?"

The only words close were "joined," "juxtaposed" and "juxtapositioned," and while I could make a case for "joined," as in "joined together," the other two words are all wrong. And, "joined," while true, isn't quite the sense I wanted to convey.

In the end I gave up on the "J" and crossed over to "G," which often has the same pronunciation in a word as "J." For example, the "J" in "jump" and the "G" in gypsy, have exactly the same sound; so I decided to use the word "Generated."

I like the word "generated" here for it carries forth the creation theme as well as conjuring up images of electrical energy or power. We also see the word "gene" in "generated," which in this context suggests that "Joy" is a rightful part of our DNA. Furthermore, we note that the word, "generosity," begins with the same 4 letters, and that Jesus said, "it is more blessed (gives us more joy) to give than to receive." We have been Generated by God for Joy.

Thus, the ultimate purpose for which God created us is Joy. The old hymn calls it "joy unspeakable and full of glory." The old church confession of faith says: "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." **Our wonderful God has created us and purposed us for joy."**

Our Scripture passages this morning from the Gospel of John are

part of what we call the "Upper Room Discourse." This is Jesus talking with His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion. These are His parting words to them before His death. In John 15:9-11, He tells them: *"As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. If you keep My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."*

We notice three things here. First, Jesus tells His disciples that He loves them and that it is a great love, a Divine love. He says, "I love you the way the Father loves me." Second, Jesus gives His disciples a command: They are to remain in His love by keeping His commands. Then the third thing Jesus tells them goes to purpose; this is why I command you to remain in My love and keep my commands: *"I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."*

My sense of what Jesus is saying here is not that we have to, or ever could, earn God's love, or that we could ever lose God's love. God's love for us is a given. It's God's nature to love us and He cannot contradict Himself. But if we fail to love God back by disobeying His commands, it will cost us the one thing that God wants most for us and that is for us to experience His joy, and to experience it completely and for keeps. C. S. Lewis once said, "Joy is the serious business of heaven." The old confession says "to enjoy Him forever." It is God's purpose for us to experience His joy in the here and now and then for all eternity. **In heaven we will be "jumping for joy!"**

In John 16:20-22, Jesus speaks about what is going to happen in the lives of His disciples after His death. He says to them: *"Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy."*

What we notice here is that for the followers of Jesus Christ, grief and pain are only brief interruptions along the path to everlasting joy. Psalm 30:5 says, *"For His anger (God's anger) lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoice*

*comes in the morning."* The apostle, Paul, tells us in Romans 8:28, that

*"All things work together for good to those who love Him (God) and are called according to His purpose."*

Once again, we are assured of God's purpose and plan for our lives. All of this mess we're in is going some place. All of our struggles, all of our heartaches, all of our failures and all of our sufferings—if only we remain with the Lord—are leading to a glorious conclusion. Like a mother in labor, the pain is real, but the purpose is not the pain but but the joy of bringing a baby into the family. People talk about seeing light at the end of the tunnel; we Christians can claim an open tomb at the end of ours. "Amen?"

What we notice in John 16:23-24 is that because of the open tomb of Jesus we don't have to wait to the end of life to know and to experience His joy. Jesus says, *"In that day you will no longer ask Me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in My name. Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."*

What is promised to us here is a present, ongoing, relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, that leads to a present, ongoing, relationship with God the Father. John exclaims in 1 John 3:1a: *"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"* The mark of that relationship is the privilege of asking and receiving in the name of Jesus. This means that as those who believe in and follow Jesus, we have through Jesus the privilege of asking and receiving of the Father the same as He has. Every true follower of Jesus shares the birthright of Jesus and is entitled to the same inheritance. **We will learn to ask and receive and our joy will be complete.**

Nevertheless, we ought to say a bit more about the "tunnel" I mentioned a few moments ago. At this point in our Lenten journey, Jesus will soon make His way into Jerusalem where He will declare His authority as the Son of God to set all things right. He will go into the Temple courts and chase out the corruption. He will go before the high priest Caiaphas and before all the chief priests and elders of the Jewish people and tell them of the seat awaiting Him, the Christ, at the right hand of God. He will go before Pilate, the Roman authority, and affirm that He is the King of the Jews.

Then Jesus will go to the cross where He will complete the work He was born for, the work He had come to do. Back in John 15:13 & 14,

Jesus told His disciples: *“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”* Jesus will suffer for us and die for us and then be raised to be recognized as Lord of Lords and King of Kings, our High Priest and forever our Savior. The disciple’s grief will turn to joy. Our grief will turn to joy. But before our joy is complete there is a tunnel through which we must pass. No one is exempt the darkness and trials of the tunnel.

Those of us who attended the Lenten Luncheon at Wehnwood UMC this past Wednesday, heard a powerful message about what it means to follow Christ in the midst of this world. The pastor’s key point was that mere believing in Jesus is not enough. As James tells us, *“The demons also believe and they tremble.”* Beyond mere believing is believing to the degree that we follow Jesus as the Lord of our lives. We allow Him to lead us, change us, use us to represent Him in the battle against everything that steals joy from every part of God’s creation. We are to follow Christ in the war against corruption and injustice in every dark corner of this world. We are to follow Christ into the lives of people who need help with real needs and who need to hear an encouraging word of forgiveness, healing and hope. We are to follow Christ in His desire to have all people hear God’s truth and to set the captives free.

At first glance one might ask, who could object to any of that? Isn’t this what everybody wants? But the joylessness of millions after thousands of years of so-called human progress, answers the question. The influence of the Evil one is still strong. There are many people who use their substantial imaginations to think up ways to gain power, wealth, and pleasure at the expense of others. All human governments share a measure of corruption, and institutional and corporate scandals are commonplace.

Following Christ means more than following Him into worship services, bible studies, and prayer meetings. Following Christ means following Him into places and situations we would rather not go. It means speaking truth to some people who would rather not hear it. It means picking a fight with the Devil and all who serve him. And, for that, there is a price to pay.

In John 15:18-20a, Jesus tells His followers: *“If the world hates you,*

5

*keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.*

*Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”*

Hearing this might lead one to think that the joy of following Jesus just got up and left the room! But it is interesting what the Bible has to say about this. The writer of Hebrews, in Hebrews 12:2 says of Jesus: *“For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

James 1:2-3 tell us that what was true of Jesus should also be true for us: James says, *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

In Acts 5, it tells how the apostles of Jesus were arrested and put in the public jail, because some of the Jewish leaders were jealous of all the wonderful things they were doing. Although they wanted to put the apostles to death, cool heads prevailed so that they only “flogged” the apostles before releasing them. But when I say “only flogged them,” that was not a little thing. The NIV Study Bible footnote says: *“flogged. Beaten with the Jewish penalty of ‘forty lashes minus one.’”* In other words, the apostles were beaten to within an inch of their lives!

Nevertheless, Acts 5:41 (NLT) records their response: *“The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of Jesus.”* Here is something hard for us to wrap our minds around, but in the way of Christ, suffering does not preclude joy. What precludes or makes joy impossible is failing to follow Jesus, but faithfully following Jesus always pays a dividend of joy.

Beloved, we have been generated by God for joy. This is something the world can’t give us or ever take away. **Joy is the reward received by all who follow Jesus.**

## The Fourth Street Church of God

2001 Fourth Street  
Altoona, PA 16601  
942-1007/946-4110

Sermon for March 18, 2018  
**Generated for Joy**

**John 15:9-17; 16:16-24**

Jon R. Neely, Pastor

[neelyjon@gmail.com](mailto:neelyjon@gmail.com)  
[4thstcog.com](http://4thstcog.com)