

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, 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. 9 As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you. (CEB)

One of my projects in these last two weeks before sabbatical has been trying to conquer my church e-mail inbox. Don't get me wrong, I tend to read my e-mail promptly and delete junk semi-promptly, and respond to e-mails fairly promptly, but then they just sort of sit there... Even though I could file them into appropriate folders, or delete them after the work is done....They sit. Thousands of them. Sometimes I'm glad of this when I want to rediscover a particularly good focal image a previous graphic designer prepared or remind myself of a previous decision, for example. But mostly its digital clutter.

My intention is to NOT read any church e-mail that comes in this summer. If you e-mail me you'll get an automatic message that lets you know to whom to forward your message if you wish me to receive word of it when I return or if you need immediate attention or assistance. But in order to be ready for a mass delete upon returning, I need to get my inbox in order.

I'm only sharing this administrative tedium because of the emotions it stirred up. I tapped into a fair amount of grief. Reviewing e-mail from at least 6 of the 7 years I've been with you brings back people who are no longer with us, ministries that have ended, previous moments of strife and struggle. It's a lot. We've shared and lost a lot in 7 years, have we not?

But that's not the whole story. It's never the whole story. And Paul wrote his letter to the church in Phillipi from prison. And yet joy spills from his quill. Rejoice in the Lord,

Please note: actual sermon content may vary from this manuscript at time of delivery.

always, he says. Again, I say, rejoice. That feels like a tall order in anxious, challenging times. Joy requires a lot of energy. It requires being gentle with one another. It requires surrendering all that troubles us to the care of God. And accessing peace that makes no earthly sense. But, hey... that sounds pretty great. A joy-filled community, dealing with one another gently, surrendering the big stuff to God, and filled with peace that surpasses understanding? Yes, please. Let's be that.

How? Paul says it is largely a matter of how we focus our minds. He invited the Philippians and he invites us to think on the true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable.... If there is any excellence, anything worthy of praise... this is what we are to think about. Some of us have brains that are inclined to focus on the negative. To focus on what's missing, what's wrong, what could go wrong. I suspect many of us have seasons when our minds are focused in this way. As I sorted through old e-mail— though there was excellence in there, I focused on grief. It happens.

So I'd like us to do something together today. I'd like us to think back on 7 years together. And try to focus on excellence and that which is worthy of praise— if you're with us on-line feel free to drop it in the chat. If you're here in person you can call it out or come to the mic. I'll repeat into the mic things I hear. If you have a long story, please come to the mic. What has been excellent and worthy of praise in our 7 years together?

So much.

Continue to think on these things and seek out excellence in your summer adventures pursuing hearts' desires, and I trust that indeed the God of peace will be with you.