**Two Rivers Mission Community**

**Values 5: Joy**

Nehemiah 8.1-12; Luke 10.17-23

Today we come to the end of our sermon series looking at our values. We’ve looked at how we want to be churches which display the characteristics of love, faith, being people of Word and Spirit, and generosity.

Today we are going to look at the value of “Joy”.

Now ask people where they go to have a good time, most people will come up the cinema, theatre, night club, shopping… maybe the beach or into the hills… probably pretty much anywhere other than church.

Its not surprising really.

They’ve been told that the devil has all the best tunes and that anything fun is ‘so good it’s probably a sin’.

We haven’t been helped by films which show Jesus as a serious, maybe even otherworldly figure.

Robert Powell in the film Jesus of Nazareth never even blinks!

We’ve bought, and sold, Jesus as a man of sorrows (Isaiah 53.3) without putting the other side of the story.

Yes, Jesus did carry the weight of the world on his shoulders in the Garden of Gethsemane and die under the weight of our sin at Calvary.

But this is the same Jesus whose birth was heralded by a multitude of angels proclaiming ‘good news of great joy to all mankind’ (Luke 2.10).

It’s the Jesus who turned water into wine at a wedding… party on!

It’s the Jesus who poked fun at the pharisees with stories of specks and planks in peoples’ eyes.

It’s the Jesus who loved to turn things on their head… what about that story of a *good* Samaritan – everyone knows that Samaritans are a bunch of rotters!!

Being with Jesus must have been such fun –

He loved a party… he was accused of being a glutton and drunkard.

He told wonderful stories… compared heaven to a banquet.

He did mind-blowing miracles.

And even raised the dead for goodness sake… literally for goodness sake!

Galatians 5.22-23 says that one of the nine fruits of the Spirit is joy.

If the Spirit of Jesus is characterised by joy, then surely Jesus is too!

So, lets dismiss any idea that being a Christian is supposed to make us boring, serious, or miserable.

We might take some things seriously… but one of the things we take seriously is joy!

So, this morning I want to look briefly at the reasons we have, as Christians, to be joyful.

Then look at the benefits of our being joyful to the lives of our churches, before drawing one or two conclusions.

So, what are the reasons we have, as Christians to be joyful?

Here are five I thought of. You can see if you can add any more.

1. We have joy because we have been forgiven our sins, put right with God and made his children.

In our Gospel reading this morning we heard how Jesus told his disciples to rejoice that their names have been written in the book of life.

As those who have repented and believed, we have moved from death to life, darkness to light, objects of God’s wrath to children living in his love.

Allelulia!

1. We have joy because we have the sure and certain hope of eternal life with Jesus.

Hebrews 12.2 tells us that Jesus endured the cross for the ‘joy set before him’.

Like Jesus, we look ahead to a day when we will get to enjoy heaven; free from all pain, suffering and death.

Purple Ronnie captures our hope perfectly in his poem:

*“Heaven’s like a funfair, where all the rides are free*

*The clouds turn into bumper cars and there’s a hotdog tree.*

*God’s in charge of parties and his son brews up the wine*

*So all the folk can muck around and have a splendid time.”*

1. We have joy because *between* our becoming children of God and making it to heaven, we have the joy of an ongoing relationship with Jesus.

Our Old Testament reading tells the story of God’s people after their return to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon. They rediscover the Law of the lord.

They weep because they haven’t kept it. But Ezra says ‘no’ – you now have heard and understand and have committed yourself to God’s commands.

It’s not a day for sorrow, but for joy! Celebrate!

We find joy as we walk with the Lord, as we hear his voice through his word, as we experience his presence by his Spirit (ooh – Word and Spirit – isn’t that one of our values!).

1. We have joy because, as we go on in our relationship with God we experience more and more of his wonderful provision and action on our lives.

Think Hannah in the Old Testament who sang for joy when God answered her prayer and gave her a child.

Think of cripple healed by Peter and John in the New testament who went walking and leaping and praising God.

Think of the people of Israel singing for joy at God’s deliverance from Egypt and provision of the promised land.

Think of Paul and Barnabus praising God in a prison cell for giving them the chance to suffer for Jesus!

What has the Lord done for you that makes your heart sing for joy?

1. We have joy because God allows us to work with him in his work in the world.

Our lives have meaning and purpose. We get to join in with stuff that has blessing for now and eternity.

Again, in our gospel reading, Jesus sent the disciples out to preach, heal and drive out demons as a sign of his kingdom. How they rejoiced when even the demons obeyed them in Jesus’ name!

So, we have many reasons for being people of joy!

And joy is good for us and good for our work as God’s people in our parishes.

Ezra told the people of Israel, “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8.10).

Joy protects us from cynicism.

Its an antidote to the trials and difficulties of life….

And its attractive!

I’ll be honest. I’m not against a bit of hellfire and damnation from the pulpit.

We need to warn people of the danger they face if they reject Jesus.

I’m not against taking sin seriously… sin is bad – it caused Jesus’ death on the cross, it separates us from God and it messes up lives… it’s not trivial and we need to be serious about turning away from it.

BUT, even when we warn about sin and hell, we will always hold out the hope of salvation through Jesus and the hope of everlasting life.

Christianity is good news!

We must never let it be anything else, or we betray Jesus, the man of joy!

John Piper, the pastor and theologian has written a lot about joy.

His contention is that the aim of each human should be to find joy… its what God created us for.

The problem is that people are looking for joy in all the wrong places – just look at the society we live in.

True joy is to be found in God.

The Shorter Westminster catechisms puts it like this:

“The chief end (purpose) of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever”.

God is glorified when we find our joy in him.

It shows that God is more wonderful, beautiful, captivating, more satisfying, more to be sought and treasured than anything else.

It shows God to be more precious than anything the word has to offer.

So, let us pursue joy with determined single mindedness; the joy that paradoxically comes from picking up our cross and following Jesus all the way to the heart of God.

In conclusion, where should people be heading to find the joy they crave?

To Jesus!

So, the challenge for us, as Christians, is to let the joy of our relationship with Jesus shine through our lives and our churches, so that those outside our church families exclaim –

“Wow! I want some of that!”

“I’ll have some of what they’re having, thank you very much!”

Love, faith, Word and Spirit, generosity and joy.

Five values we want to embody in our lives and churches.

Let’s pray that God would give us these as gifts from his Spirit, and let’s do all we can to foster and grow them.

To the glory of God.

Amen.