

JOY REBELS
[written in oral form]

Philippians 1:27-30
Leader Magazine theme

July 25, 2021
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You are aware of today's theme from Menno Media's Leader magazine.

Yet, it is not clear.

Is it Joy Reb-els? As in jubilant gadflies and iconoclasts, and joyous resisters and anarchists?

Or, did they mean Joy Re-bels. Joy protests and is nonconforming?

If that is the case, how does Joy render that behaviour and what does it look like?

Answering that is the purpose of this sermon.

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Oh, and please do not confuse happiness and joy.

Happiness is ephemeral and easily achieved.

Set a simple goal and meeting that goal will make you happy.

Joy is much deeper and not dependent on outcome.

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First a look at the text.

Philippi, named after Alexander the Great's father, was a military city. Not only was there an important military base there, but it was also a colony for retired soldiers.

Keep that in mind because these verses deal with persecution.

The Christians were being persecuted because they were insulting the city's values.

Verse 27 contains the focus verse: "ONLY, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

The phrase "live your life in a manner" is a euphemism.

The literal translation from the Greek is "Let your citizenship be."

Let your citizenship be with Christ.

Paul goes on to say, "Stand firm" in your allegiance to the way of Christ and not to the city or state.

Paul is making a strong political declaration defending their nonconformity to the military culture.

The Gospel of Christ does not abide with militarism.

The secular community could clearly see that and resented the Christians' message and presence.

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Are we known for our peace position?

Are we an irritation to our culture?

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While pastoring in Kansas in 2002, President Bush and his government were pushing the US to war.

My church distributed yard signs that said, "Peace is patriotic", with the churches name at the bottom.

I had a T-shirt that said, "No War" and another with the message "Peace takes Guts."
I proudly wore them.

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People would often comment, "What makes you smarter than the government?" I would reply, "The truth."

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In 2008, Liberal candidate Stephane Dion came to Saskatchewan to make an announcement while campaigning.

Joe Guenther, a member of my church, was a dairy farmer and likely the only liberal supporter north of Regina.

So, Dion selected his farm for his announcement.

Joe invited me to attend.

I asked Stephane two questions about our engagement in Afghanistan.

First was, are we fighting there just to appease the Americans?

He gave the polished answer about building schools and protecting women.

I then asked him why does he think this will not end like the disaster in Vietnam where all the death and destruction were for naught.

He did not answer that question.

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Of course, the terrible conclusion is now known by all.

Militarism is a waste, it's destructive and counter to the gospel of Christ.

Yet, our nation keeps investing in it.

Canada has contributed 613 million dollars to the development of the F-35 fighter jet, ....to make sure "that war goes on."

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Militarism is just one cultural norm that we resist and work to transform.

The gospel of Christ rebels against bigotry, sexism, racism and other injustices.

The way of Christ is living nonconformity and challenging the unjust norms of society. This includes BIPOC racism.

White people struggle to recognize systemic racism.

We do not see it because we are in it and it serves us.

The gospel of Christ can help open our eyes.

The gospel of Christ leads us to be agents for change.

I hope the church can transform its terrible connection to residential schools to one of leading reconciliation, justice, and healing with indigenous peoples. We can. We must.

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One appalling injustice that the church has been mostly silent and tolerant about is wealth disparity.

We know the very rich are getting richer, the poor poorer, and the rest merely holding on. This is abusive; it is a crime against humanity.

During the first 9 months of the pandemic, billionaire wealth increase by 3.9 trillion dollars. The sale of private jets soared.\*

[\*Oxfam Jan. 2021]

Moreover, the ultra-rich are the most responsible for causing climate change. They have the greatest carbon footprint.

Oxfam reported in January of this year that the “richest of the rich are driving climate change.”

The richest 1% use twice as much carbon as the poorest 50%, over the past 25 years.

And, the public applauds the billionaires’ latest extravagant hobby of rocketing into space. ???

Such inequality is unsustainable.

How will follows of Christ react? What will the protest be?

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The prophet Amos was a nonconformist. In fact, he was not even the “official” sanctioned prophet.

Yet, he bravely spoke out.

The injustices that Amos exposed all are rooted in the way his society had become distorted by inequality.

Faced with injustice, Amos, strived to help the people remember what God intended from the beginning.

God intended that everyone is to have enough, that the rich do not become too rich, and that the poor do not become too poor. The way of Christ is God’s way.

Apostle Paul wrote, “As it is written, ‘The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.’” (2 Corinthians 8:15)

Paul was quoting Exodus 16:18. That’s part of the instructions Moses gave to the Hebrews about the collecting of the Manna.

Everyone was to have enough.

What's more, Moses warned them that if they kept too much, the surplus, what they could not use, would go bad on them.

How about that for a metaphor?

Your surplus will spoil. It will spoil you. It will spoil society.

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Is that not what Leviticus 25 and the Year of Jubilee is about? Every 50th year, everything goes back to square one. Debts are cancelled. Land is redistributed. Society is equalized.

Who knows how long the Israelites actually practiced Jubilee, if at all?

The Year of Jubilee was a brilliant idea intended to protect people, to guarantee that inequality did not spiral out of control, destabilizing society, and producing injustices of many kinds.

The Year of Jubilee was one of the Great Equalizers.

There have been three other Great Equalizers in history: Pestilence or plague, Revolutions, and wars.

Thomas Piketty notes this in his first very popular book, "Capital in the Twenty-First Century." He writes, "The sharp reduction in income inequality that we observe in almost all the rich countries between 1914 and 1945 was due above all to the world wars and the violent economic and political shocks they entailed..."

What connects all of the injustice was inequality.

What Amos saw was not high-minded entrepreneurs doing well through good ideas and hard work.

What Amos saw was extortion and exploitation, greed and graft and grifting. The wealthy, powerful and privileged were taking advantage of the poor, the powerless and the oppressed.

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I wish such behavior was a relic of the distant past?

What ultimately happens because of such times of inequality? Piketty writes, "At the heart of every major political upheaval lies a fiscal revolution."

It is almost as if Piketty is striving to offer a gentle warning to the kind of people who participate in the financial meetings in Davos, Switzerland, Bay Street or on Wall Street and Fleet Street.

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The masses are becoming restless and angry, and they are drinking the Kool-Aid of conspiracy theories.

Who will stop the injustice of wealth disparity?

The gospel of Christ can make a difference, when it rises from Joy.

But, please understand I am not condoning the Joy of Protest.

The way of Christ includes the protest from joy, and not the joy of protest.

I confess much of my anti-war ranting that I mentioned was not from Joy.  
I was more motivated by anger and an arrogant confidence that my conclusions were better.  
Albeit, I did derive my stance on the gospel, but my impetus was off.

Joy emits celebration, not judgment.  
It is a celebration that rattles the norms of society.

Joy invites in. It does not polarize.

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We can gain some insight from the "Black Joy".

New York writer, Kleavy Cruz started the Black Joy project in 2015.

Chante Joseph wrote in July 20, 2020 that Joy and resistance are one and the same.

Society tells Black people to be quiet and you are too loud.
Black People revelling in joy is an act of resistance.
And, it is healing.

Black Joy counters governments trying to criminalize "Black Lives Matter."

Black Joy is defiant. "You're Not going to subdue us"
"You're Not going to win."
The joy from the gospel of Christ is defiant.

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We find such joy when we embrace the whole gospel message. **When** we are imbued with  
grace, redemption, justice, forgiveness and love we will over flow with joy and God's Spirit.

That joy will illuminate the anger, fear and injustices in our culture,.....and it will affect change.  
Change.... Not from malice, but from love.

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Paul wrote this section in Philippians to comfort the followers of Christ.
Their gospel radiance was drawing persecution and condemnation.

Paul was saying, "This is normal. Expect that sort of reaction, and it is a sign that you are
being faithful to Christ.

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May we be so faithful.  
May we overflow with gospel joy.  
May our joy for justice and grace be clearly seen.

May we expect and accept persecution.

May we be as Christ..... and not be silent.