

A Subversion
[written in oral form]

Philippians 3
Summer series on Philippians

August 15, 2021
Gordon Allaby

Today's designated theme is "Joy Subverts".
Subverts means to overthrow, cause a downfall or ruin.

This could apply to how we regard the things that prevented joy or that took joy away.

I really think Joy arises from a deep inner love, and that love is part of our connection with God.
Therefore, joy includes God's passion for justice, peace and grace.

Subsequently, joy confronts and exposes the chains of bondage, abuse and destruction.

For example, those who possess an inner joy will not tolerate a racist or sexist comment. Those remarks are distasteful and troubling—counter to joy. Such assaults are thieves of joy and are abusive.

~~~~~  
Keep all that in mind as we examine Philippians chapter three.

All the verses were not included in the reading, today.  
~~~~~

Except for verse one where Paul writes, "Rejoice in the Lord", joy is not mentioned at all. I admit, this threw me for a loop. ??

~~~~~  
This section of the Philippians letter feels like an insertion. The tone and content are quite different from the rest of the letter.  
Or, he was just having one of those days. ??

Paul is giving a pep talk from prison. He is trying to be persuasive and encouraging, and this likely includes for himself, too.

I have always appreciated the motivating words of "Press on", yet there are parts of this section that trouble me.

Calling his former group that he was loyal to "Dogs", "evil workers" and mutilators is caustic and derogatory.

He went on to say how he was the best at that self-righteous system / that legalistic religion of the Pharisees.

Yet, his new divine revelation had caused him to reject all of that.

He had a radical change of values.

Paul does Not want anything to do with those who claim to know the answers.

A religion of right and wrong and absolutes can be appealing to some. So, Paul was trying to convince the believers in Christ to reject that way of “certainty”.

~~~~~

Again, at the end of chapter 3, Paul is very sardonic. He was warning the believers to Not be lured into the secular culture. He calls them enemies, shameless and gluttons.

As before, this personal assault bothered me. So, I decided to leave out verse 17.

In that verse, Paul told the readers to “imitate” himself. I did not find Paul to be someone that I admired or wanted as a model. That was what I thought on Tuesday when the bulletin was put together. I have since moderated my position.

~~~~~

I think Paul was a passionate, energized person, to the point of being abrasive at times. That is who Paul likely was.

His “conversion” / his new discovery from God through Christ Did NOT change him. Paul’s theology and values changed. How Paul engaged in life changed, but he was still Paul.

He was a zealous devotee before and continued to be, just for different reasons. Paul did Not become a different person.

This is significant. In this is the message “Be You.” God wants you—who you are.

~~~~~

I think one of the most powerful lessons I can share is that God chose me to do ministry. God chose who I am with all my weaknesses and flaws. Contemplating this is humbling.

God wants to use me / work through me. To be sure, the Bible is full of flawed characters who became God’s agents. Yet, knowing this became personal.

~~~~~

I am grateful for my present situation. In past positions, I was expected to have all desirable attributes. In other words, to be more than who I was. I found that demeaning and difficult.

Now, I can be me. Carmen and Kendra have excellent gifts, traits and skills that I do not possess. I greatly appreciate that and them. It is freeing.

Moreover, when we realize that God accepts and loves all of us, then we need not compare ourselves to others.  
And, we have no grounds for judging others.

We all have flaws and weaknesses...AND... virtues and delightful attributes. We are different, but still loved by God.

Embracing this contributes to having Joy.  
~~~~~

Another message in this passage is also significant.

It is living in faith. Faith is belief in action.
Faith is a way to live. It is living a devotion to the unknown.
~~~~~

The focus verse is "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection."

Christ transcends. Christ is more than just the life of Jesus.  
Christ is a transforming, vibrant message from God.  
And, all that awe and wonder began with the resurrection.

YET, Paul did not really understand that. He wanted to know that.  
I do not think we do either.

Paul is admitting to living in the mystery.  
He does not have the answers that his former legalistic ways provided.

He does have a great passion and devotion to learning and growing.  
That hunger impels him to Press On.

He confessed, "I do not consider that I have made it my own. But this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal...the call of God in Christ.

He admitted he was not there / that he did not possess the answers and the conclusions.  
He was living by faith in the unknown.  
He was spiritually compelled to thrive in the mystery.  
~~~~~

Perhaps, there is latent joy in all of this. ??
???

This is Paul's story. What is yours?
???

What motivates you to live in faith?
Why are you watching this virtual service?
What is your soul song?
What is your impetus?

???

Could this latent joy be the implanted spark from God?

What did Paul discover on the road to Damascus?

Could it be that God opened his spiritual eyes to see his own inner being?

Did he discover God within and with that latent joy?

????

~~~~~

Having a good quote in a sermon seems to be expected.

So, I will quote Betty Pries from her soon to be released book "The Space Between Us."

She called this condition, this inner being the "Deeper self."

Betty explained the deeper self this way:

"We are none of the awkward, thoughtless, or harmful things we have done in our lives; we are also none of our grand accomplishments, or our flights of glory. We simply are...we are carriers of divine breath coursing through us."

Betty referred to Thomas Merton who described "this inner being as the point of nothingness within, which when discovered becomes the beginning point of everythingness."

Did you catch "the beginning point". This is not the conclusion, as Paul implied about Pressing ON.

~~~~~

We are just beginning, and I dare say, that is part of the mystery.

Betty went on to explain this state of awareness is like "standing under a waterfall of love."

That image could define joy.

~~~~~

Paul was beaming with this passion / this divine awareness.

That is why, in typical Paul style, he warned other believers to NOT be seduced by promises of answers or instant gratification. Instant gratification is settling for a false answer.

Paul was advocating for a life in the unknown, in the mystery... living in faith.

~~~~~

I think the real subverting part of today's theme is the subversion to our self-perception, and the subversion of our needs and fears.

God is encouraging us to NOT settle for assumed answers.

Joy does not reside with certainty.

Thanks be to God; we can live by faith. We can transcend beyond ourselves with God.

We pursue truth in God's mystery.

We DO seek and press on for the truth.... Whatever that is.

We press on by searching and asking lots of questions.

~~~~~

Joy subverts by tearing down our illusions.

Joy subverts by exposing our myths of certainty.

Joy subverts by breaching the walls of our constructed personality.

In the ruins of our defences joy blossoms.

~~~~~

So, be yourself. God loves who you are.

God is propelling you to soar like an eagle.

Doubt, but ask questions. Probe. Change and grow.

Inspired by the indwelling love of God we search and press on.

We live by faith travelling deeper into the unknown joy of love.

This is how we grow in God's love.