

St. Andrew's Sermons
The Rev. John Rohrs
17 Pent A; Oct. 9, 2011
Epistle: Philippians 4:1-9

Rejoice in the Lord

Yesterday, within the span of a couple of hours, I did a funeral and a wedding. Two different families, two different contexts, and obviously two very different sets of emotions; and yet these two occasions had something powerful in common. They were both full of joy.

Now that may seem strange to say in reference to a funeral, so let me explain. I wouldn't say that about every funeral, first of all. This was an older man who had lived a full life. And besides that, when I say joyful, I don't mean happy. Happiness is a feeling of the moment; it's lighthearted and fleeting. Happiness is a cup of hot chocolate on a cold day or a fun night out with your friends. It's a comeback win by your favorite sports team as the clock winds down.

Joy is something else altogether. Joy has a greater depth to it. It has a broader context – a past that leads up to that moment and a future that extends far beyond. At a wedding, you've got the history of those two families, children growing up and starting a family of their own. You have the memories of the past and the promise of the future. And in some ways it's the same at a funeral. There's much more sadness and grief, of course, but the scope is similar. You look back over a lifetime of memories, and you also, in our Christian context, look forward to that person's new and lasting life with God. So that's why I say both were joyful occasions yesterday, because both had that depth of feeling, that broader context as we gathered to celebrate life and love.

These are the types of moments that bring us together as a church community, and they're the same moments that St. Paul had with the church in Philippi. By all accounts, it was his favorite church, the community he was most fond of. In our epistle reading today he's writing some parting words to his beloved friends, and his final message is to wish them joy. "Rejoice in the Lord always," he says; "again, I will say, Rejoice." He seems to know that it won't come easy. They'll have to overcome some conflict. They'll have to remember to be gentle with

one another and to pray without ceasing. They'll have to trust in God's mercy, and in time they will find joy.

These words are powerful reminders for any church community, and they're a good reflection for us at St. Andrew's. We too are facing a moment of great depth. In a few weeks we will begin our centennial celebration. We'll look to the past and remember all of the people and stories that have made this such a special place. At the same time, we'll look to the future and pledge our continuing support for the mission and ministry of this community. We'll look forward – no doubt with a mixture of uncertainty and excitement – to the next one hundred years, and as we do my prayer is that in the midst of it all we will remember to trust in God and to rejoice in the Lord.

To rejoice in the faithfulness of the God who has guided us for a century. To rejoice in the rich history of this place, to rejoice in our bright future, and most of all, to rejoice in the here and now, in the very present gift of love and life that God has given us. Happiness and sadness will come and go, but what unites us and sustains us is the promise of joy. Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice! Amen.