

TITLE: “Joy, Even with a Missing Piece”

TEXTS: I Thessalonians 5:16-17 (NT p. 205); Philippians 4:4-7 (NT p. 198); 10-13 (p. 199) – to be read throughout the sermon

Introduction – Being thankful for your life just as it is

From the *Burt and I* series.

When I was a boy, my father gave me a turkey chick to raise and fatten for Thanksgiving dinner. He grew into a fine, fat gobbler and the day before Thanksgiving, my father told me to kill the bird, pluck it and clean it. ...Well, I looked at the turkey, ...and the turkey looked at me, ...and I told father that I would wait a while.

That night, my father told me to kill the bird or he would. Well, I looked at the bird, ...and he looked at me, ...and I told father I'd do it after he went to bed.

After father'd gone to bed, I got out the axe. I looked at the turkey, ...he looked at me, ...and I didn't have the heart to kill 'im. So, I gave him some sleepin' pills, plucked him and put him in the fridgiator.

Next mornin', when father opened the fridgiator door, that turkey come out struttin' across the kitchen floor proud and nekkid as the day he was born. You know we never did kill that bird. My father and I spent the rest of Thanksgivin' day, knittin' him a sweater.

This is Thanksgiving week and the sermon this morning is about being thankful. The KEY to finding the JOY of life each day is to be deeply thankful each day. But thankfulness does not always come easily. That is because we always have the capacity to imagine that life COULD be better.

So, if you want to find the joy of life each day, you have a big decision to make: Should you change your life situation?

SHOULD you get more education or training?

Should you make a commitment regarding a relationship?

Should you get another job?

Should you move someplace else?

There are three brief things I want to say about changing your life situation, and the most important will be last.

First, the definition of crazy, which I mentioned last on September 12<sup>th</sup>: “Craziness is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” Sometimes we DO need to make a major change if we want different results. However, all change involves risk, and risky things are scary. That leads into the next point.

I found this in the book *Who moved My Cheese?* by Dr. Spencer Johnson. The main point I remember from the book is this: “What would you do if you were NOT afraid? ...Dr. Johnson gives some steps that will prepare you to make a change in your life.

What Dr. Johnson DOESN'T bring up is God. And that leads into the third point, which is to check any major change out with God. God wants the BEST for you and those you love. If you ARE to make change, God WILL be with you and will support you through the steps to realizing that change.

If you are NOT to make change, and chances are pretty good that you are already exactly and precisely where God WANTS you to be this morning, then God will HELP you to find the joy of life each day by helping you to be thankful. And that is what the sermon is about this morning: Being thankful for your life just as it is.

#### 1. Give thanks in ALL circumstances

Our first Scripture reads: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in ALL circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

How can we give THANKS in ALL circumstances, when some circumstances seem intolerable and others fall FAR short of what they COULD be?

One way is to spend time with thankful people. Who ARE the thankful people? You may think that they those who have plenty of money and can buy what they want to buy and do what they want to do. That is not what I have found. I have found the most thankful people are poor people. They also seem to be the easiest to please.

I volunteer by helping people in need who are not involved in the church. I do not count this as part of my job as your pastor and I do not charge our church mileage for things that I do. Some weeks nothing comes up, other weeks several do. Last month, one of the ladies who comes to Kitchen Cupboard asked me if I would do a wedding.

The wedding was for her teenage daughter who was 8 months pregnant. The young woman wanted to get married before the baby came. The problem was, her fiancé was in Tompkins County jail. I prayed about it. God told me to do it. So I said OK.

The bride said they wanted to write their own vows. I told her the guidelines I have for vows, which are that they must mention God, love, faithfulness and forever. Here's what she came up with (I have changed the names, of course, and the two children she mentions are the groom's from a former marriage.):

I *Josi* take you *John* as my husband, my lover, my best friend, my everything. I vow to love you through sickness and health, through good and bad, through richer or poorer. You are everything I need and want. At this very moment I now know that God has answered all my prayers and that all my dreams have come true. I also vow to take not only you as my husband to love but also to take *Josh* and *Adam* as my step sons and to love them as much as I will our daughter *Jesse* when she comes. I knew I loved you the first time our eyes met. From just one look you stole my heart. To this day when I look in your eyes I still feel that love only growing stronger and bringing us closer together. This is the moment I have waited my whole life for. I promise to be faithful and give you all of me. I love you and always will. This is my solemn vow to you always and forever.

I've been to weddings and receptions that have cost tens of thousands of dollars. No bride has been more thankful than that young woman who had a free wedding in the visiting room of the Tompkins County jail at 8:00 a.m. on a Saturday morning.

You, and I, have everything we need to be thankful, everything we need to have the joy of life each day. If one thing in life is not going the way you want it to, be thankful for the many things that are. If you have food, clothing, a place to live, a job, people for you to love and people to love you, and if you have faith in Jesus Christ, you have everything you need to be thankful, and joyful, this morning and every morning.

## 2. Let go of apprehensive anxiety and trust God

The next Scripture reads:

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

Mark Twain said: "I am an old man and have known many troubles; ...most of them never happened." Psychologists call worrying excessively about what may happen in the future "apprehensive anxiety." Although naming it may help, actually DOING something about it is more difficult.

The KEY ingredient that enables us to stop worrying about the future is to take our minds off ourselves. ... Emily Proctor is the actress who plays investigator Calleigh Duquesne in the TV series *CSI: Miami*. In a recent article for *Guideposts* (8/10), she wrote this about her life in L.A. before she became a star:

...in the fall of 1996 it hit me that except for taking care of [my cat] Kevin, my days were all about me. Was I thin enough? Did my hair look right? Did I prepare enough for my next audition? Where was my career going?

So, she volunteered to serve at an inner city soup kitchen. One day on the way to the soup kitchen, she met Jim, who was wheelchair bound. Today, years later, this is what she has to say about Jim:

The closer we've gotten—and we've been good friends for almost 15 years now—the more I see that Jim really lives by the advice he once gave me: "If you don't like the way your life looks, change the way you look at it." He's more content and at peace with himself and with the world than anyone else I know. (p. 43).

I want you to THINK about that for a minute: "If you don't like the way your life looks, change the way you look at it." .....The more you try to control your life, the more anxious you become. Jim found that there was a LOT in his life he COULDN'T control, but he decided to make the best of what he COULD control.

God says, "Do NOT worry about anything. Instead, pray about everything and leave the future in the hands of God. And you WILL find that that, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, WILL guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

### 3. Learn to be content with what you have

The next passage reads:

<sup>10</sup>I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

The Apostle Paul, who wrote this, learned to be content with whatever he had. How do we learn to do this, to be content with whatever we have? ...Please turn in your bulletins to the page where Carol has made some drawings. [THOSE RECEIVING THIS BY EMAIL, SEE THE LAST PAGE.] These are from the book *The Missing Piece* by Shel Silverstein, from which I will read at this time:

It was a missing piece. And it was not happy.  
 So it set off in search of its missing piece.  
 And as it rolled it sang this song—  
     “Oh, I’m lookin’ for my missin’ piece  
     I’m lookin’ for my missin’ piece  
     Hi-dee-ho, here I go,  
     Lookin’ for my missin’ piece.

And because it was missing a piece  
 it could not travel very fast  
 so it would stop,  
 to talk to a worm  
 Or smell a flower  
 And sometimes it would pass a beetle  
 And sometimes a beetle would pass it  
 And this [when a butterfly landed upon it] was the best time of all.

One time it seemed to have found the perfect piece,  
 But it didn’t hold it tight enough  
 And lost it  
 Another time, it held too tightly  
 And [the piece] broke.

Then one day it came upon another piece that seemed just right.  
 ...It fit! It fit perfectly! At last! At last!  
 And away it rolled, and because now it was complete, it rolled faster and faster.  
 Faster than it had ever rolled before.  
 So fast that it could not talk to a worm  
 Or smell a flower  
 Too fast for a butterfly to land.

But it *could* sing its happy song, at last it could sing "I've found my missing piece."  
 And it began to sing—

"I've frown my mizzen' geez  
 Uf vroun my mitzin' breees  
 So kreeze ny meas  
 An bleez ny drees  
 Uf frown..."

O my, now that it was complete, it could not sing at all.

"Aha," it thought. "So *that's* how it is!"

So it stopped rolling...

And it set the piece down gently,

And slowly rolled away

And as it rolled it softly sang—

"Oh, I'm lookin' for my missin' piece  
 I'm lookin' for my missin' piece  
 Hi-dee-ho, here I go,  
 Lookin' for my missin' piece.

Conclusion – Joy without the missing piece

You will NEVER have every missing piece of your life. But you CAN be thankful for what you DO have and you CAN find joy each and every day, if you:

1. Give thanks in ALL circumstances;
2. Let go of apprehensive anxiety and trust God; and
3. Learn to be content with what you have'.

If you DO these things, you will have a thankful Thanksgiving and you will find thanksgiving and joy each and every day of your life.

Amen.

