

Faith Life Weekly –

“Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS – again I will say, REJOICE!!” (Philippians 4)

These are Paul’s instructions to the people of Philippi. They may seem kind of trite and overly simplistic to us at times. Sure, there are days when rejoicing is very easy. But then, there are other times when to rejoice seems to go against the flow of everything carrying our lives. We may be tempted at times to think, “Easy for Paul to say. He was greatly blessed by God.”

But that’s the “rub,” as Shakespeare would say. Paul did not write this coming off of a command performance witnessing thousands of conversions at the Colosseum, or after an incredible spiritual retreat along the Mediterranean Sea, or a trip to the Holy Land. Paul wrote these words from prison. And not nice, cable-TV, “white collar” prison, but “put you in chains and hand you up on the wall” prison. All this after having his life threatened numerous times, and possibly getting run out of almost as many places as he was welcomed in, and with some kind of strange medical affliction that no doctor could relieve, and after having been shipwrecked. Yes, this “rejoice” is not something that Paul came upon likely.

And the truth of it is that the “rejoice” that we find in Christ doesn’t come without enduring times of crisis, times of scarcity, times of hunger and betrayal and loss. It is on the other side of these times, and even in the middle of these times, that the message to “rejoice” truly originates outside of ourselves. It is not ours alone but Christ’s voice within us. Writer Frederick Buechner says that “rejoice is the last word and can be spoken only after the first word. The sheltering word...only after the word that leaves us without a roof over our heads, the answering word only after the word it answer.”

To say that we are Christ’s is not to say that we are exempt of any calamity or hardship this life can bring. But it is to say that we can respond as others cannot. We are different for what springs from what we are dealt and for the hope that it reflects. We live with one foot on the other side of eternity. Ok, maybe most days it feels more like we’re holding onto that resurrection reality by our fingernails. But it is enough. We are never without cause to rejoice because the hand that holds us is stronger, broader, wiser, and more powerful than anything that might oppose us. So we can praise you in the storm.

Speaking of which, here’s a link to listen to.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUWbmtbzDno>

The song is by Casting Crowns. You may have heard that they’ll be at the Heartland Events Center on September 2nd. The concert is FREE with an admission to the State Fair. There will be a group going from the church if you’d like some familiar faces to attend it with. The concert is general admission, so the seating is first come, first serve. It begins at 8:00 p.m. that night, and is a great and rare opportunity to see probably the most influential and talented Christian band going right now here in Grand Island.

By the way, if you’re not going on September 2nd (though you really should go – with the church, with your family, with neighbors), I am looking for a babysitter. Because I will be there.

