

Rejoice Together!**Philippians 4:1-9****Sunday, October 25, 2020****Beargrass Christian Church****I. INTRODUCTION.**

- A. First, Ellen and I want to express our deep gratitude to you.
 - 1. Last Sunday we were overwhelmed by all of the Beargrass Saints who came by for the “Bond-Voyage” celebration.
 - 2. What a joy it was to see so many of you “live and in person.”
 - 3. We are very grateful for the creative efforts of the staff and planning team who made everything go smoothly.
 - 4. Thanks for all of your kind words, cards, and generous gifts.
- B. We have been flippin’ through Philippians and today we will conclude a four-part sermon series called “Together.”
 - 1. Paul encourages us to stand, serve, and strive together.
 - 2. Today’s message is “Rejoice Together!”
 - 3. Paul is writing from jail to a congregation he clearly loves.
 - 4. I chose Philippians for this final series because Paul says a lot of things to them in his letter that I would like to say to you.
 - 5. So, here is the text for today from Philippians 4.
- C. “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.
 - 1. “I urge Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.”
 - 2. “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Jesus.”
 - 3. “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.”

II. PAUL LOVES THESE PEOPLE!

- A. Throughout this letter, Paul encourages them to stick together.
 - 1. And yet, despite his glowing comments, he is concerned.
 - 2. He realizes that unity in a community can be a challenge.
- B. One of the shocking lines in Paul’s letter is verse 4:2.
 - 1. Let’s remember how this letter is communicated.
 - a. When this church meets for worship, they gather in a home.
 - b. They do not have the luxury of having Bibles and hymnals.
 - c. So, the letter is read aloud—it is an oral and aural event—spoken and heard by the members of the church.

- d. Imagine that you are sitting in that congregation.
- 2. Paul talks about many lofty theological ideas and concepts.
- 3. But then he blurts out in front of God and everybody: “Euodia and Syntyche—get along with each other!”
- C. One pastor said: “As a preacher, I like to go after big game in my sermons—justice, peace, systemic racism, deep theological issues.
 - 1. “I keep waiting and hoping for the church to rise above its pettiness and go on to grander and greater things.
 - 2. “But there I am in my study when someone rushes into my office and shouts, ‘Preacher, come quick!’
 - 3. “Euodia and Syntyche are fighting—and it’s getting ugly!”
- D. Why does Paul deal with such seemingly petty matters?
 - 1. Is it possible that the health and unity of the church are at stake?
 - 2. Perhaps unity begins with you and me?

III. THE WAY WE TREAT EACH OTHER MATTERS.

- A. The things we do and say make a difference.
 - 1. Life in community can be divine, but it can also be divisive.
 - 2. The church can be a source of great bliss—and blisters!
 - 3. Folks who enjoy each other are tested when they discover that they are in very different places politically and theologically.
 - 4. Angry words are spoken, relationships broken, conflict happens.
- B. A cartoon in a journal depicted a sign on a church bulletin board similar to those in factories: “213 Days without a Split.”
- C. So, we don’t give up on each other.
 - 1. Euodia and Syntyche—get along—be of the same mind in Jesus.
 - 2. Talk to each other—work through your differences.
 - 3. Remember what God has done for you.
- D. A Dennis the Menace cartoon is insightful.
 - 1. Dennis and Joey are walking away from the next-door neighbors’ house, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson.
 - 2. Both of them have their hands loaded with cookies.
 - 3. Joey asks, “I wonder what we did to deserve this?”
 - 4. Dennis says, “Look, Joey, Mrs. Wilson gives us cookies—not because we are nice—but because she is nice.”
- E. And that is the Gospel—we are blessed not because of what we have done—but because we are loved by a graceful, generous God.
 - 1. This gives us every reason to rejoice and respond!
 - 2. Paul tells us to focus on the things that are excellent and good.
 - 3. He connects thought and action, doctrine and practice.

IV. SO MANY OF YOU DO THIS SO VERY WELL.

- A. Some of you remember this hat.
 - 1. Back in the fall of 1996, a search team and I were in conversation about a possible call to come to Beargrass.
 - 2. We survived the vetting and the voting.
 - 3. Don Towles was the chair of the team and he invited us to come.
 - 4. We were thrilled—we couldn’t wait to get here!
 - 5. We made a visit to finalize the compensation details.

- B. Beargrass appointed three outstanding people for this task—Doug Becker, Jim Montgomery, and Frank Farris.
1. They were the “SEAL” team—I guess “SEAL TEAM 3?!”
 2. They were to seal the deal for us to come.
 3. And they also had a common athletic allegiance.
 4. They were all big fans of a school somewhere east of this place.
 5. In their compensation documents they made several references to the need for me to support a particular school.
- C. Then we came to the bottom line.
1. They made it clear that they wanted us to stay for a long time.
 2. And then these three professionals kind of braced themselves.
 3. I think they fully expected a counter-offer.
 4. I scanned through the papers again and said, “This looks great!”
 5. Doug, the attorney, said, “That’s it?!”—and it was.
 6. I thought to myself, “I GET to serve at this church!”
- D. But I was suspicious about the athletic clauses.
1. So, I did a little homework and came prepared for our first meet-and-greet with the church family—a very nice reception.
 2. We had a little time for some “Q and A.”
 3. I said that I had heard that the athletic rivalries were strong.
 4. So, I told the people to let me know which bill to turn toward them when we meet each other and talk to each other.
 5. Unity grows when we can speak each other’s language.
- E. But that was the beginning of a long and wonderful relationship.
1. And for the most part, we Cats and Cards and Hoosiers and Republics and Democrats and Independents and liberals and moderates and conservatives have gotten along pretty well.
 2. Beargrass is one of the best examples of a vital “Purple Church.”
- F. My first sermon here was in mid-January of 1997.
1. Just as politicians have “planks” in their election platforms, I said that the two most important planks in my preacher platform are the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.
 2. Love God and neighbor and self and go make disciples.
 3. By the grace of God, we have done a good job with all of that.
 4. In our first five years together over 600 new members joined—so there was a great influx of new ideas, energy and resources.
- G. And we have grown in so many other ways.
1. One of the most important is in hands-on outreach.
 2. In fact, I would add a third plank for ministry based on that marvelous line from Micah; “What does the Lord require of us?”
 3. “Do what is right and just and walk humbly with God.”
 4. That completes our worship, grow, serve mission statement.
 5. If that is all of the Bible we had—and we just became proficient at those three texts—I believe that the church would thrive!
- H. One of our “numbers” people said that I have preached over 1000 sermons and helped lead over 3000 services since I have been here.
1. Today’s message is my last “official” one as senior minister.

2. Thanks for listening—and staying awake during most of them.
 3. Sometimes I have had something to say.
 4. And sometimes I have just had to say something.
- I. As I prepared for this “farewell address,” I felt a profound sense of gratitude for the years that my family and I have spent with you.
1. Thanks be to God for the special relationship we have had as pastor and people, family and church family.
 2. I am also deeply grateful for my wife, Ellen, for all of her support and help and patience—she is this pastor’s pastor.
 3. I also appreciate our brilliant children and our growing family.
 4. Heather, Brandon, Alex, Chelsea, Brian, “Three Wee Kings,” Aiden, Bryson, and Theo—I love you and I am proud of you.
 5. Beargrass, you have provided a faith foundation for them.
- J. I have deep respect and admiration for all of the staff members.
1. Some of the names and faces have changed.
 2. But for the most part, our staff members are some of the most dedicated, hard-working, creative people I have ever known.
 3. Special thanks to Susan and Steven and Rob for their friendship and ministry—they are true colleagues—and they have allowed me to actually relax when I am away from the church.
 4. And please remember, only one of your four pastors is retiring.
 5. They can handle anything at the church in an excellent way.
 6. Please help and pray for them during this time of transition.
 7. And make Rev. almost Dr. Flowers and his family feel as warmly welcomed to Beargrass as you did my family.
- K. I also have great love for you—Beargrass members and friends.
1. You have demonstrated what it means to be disciples of Christ.
 2. Through your care, your visits, your presence for each other during illness and loss you have shown Christian love.
 3. Through your outreach—not just financially—but in hands-on ministry—you have been the hands and feet and voice of God.
 4. Through worship and evangelism, you have made the Great Commandment and the Great Commission priorities.
 5. Through your stewardship, you have touched thousands of lives around the corner and around the world through your giving.
 6. Your gifts helped us maximize the potential for this campus and helped this place become “mission central” for our ministry.
- L. The list goes on and on and on and I hope you will take some time to reflect on the ways that God has blessed this congregation.
1. Give thanks for our lasting legacy, celebrate the present, and begin to dream about the possibilities for the future.
 2. But do not stare in the rear-view mirror for too long.
 - a. This is not the time to pull back—it is a time to move ahead.
 - b. This is not the time to wait and “check out the new guy.”
 - c. This is not a time for backin’ off or bailin’ out.
 - d. This is a time for steppin’ up and pitchin’ in!

3. For centuries, God has called people to pick up the ball, to finish the race, to dream new dreams, to accept the gift of the future, to receive the torch and bring light to the next generation.
 4. This is a time for clarifying our corporate sense of mission and our personal commitment to serving God and God's people.
- M. And so, today we celebrate, give thanks and rejoice—together!
1. We are so grateful for our partnership in the Gospel with you.
 2. We will continue to stand together, serve together, strive together, and rejoice together...as we move forward in faith!
 3. "I will thank God...every time I remember you."