

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

May 24, 2020

Call to worship—

- [1] Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!
- [2] Serve the LORD with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!
- [3] Know that the LORD, he is God!
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
- [4] Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!
- [5] For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations. Psalm 100

Nine week. That is how many weeks it has been since we used this room as a church. For 9 weeks Zach Boomsma has done yeoman's work being the primary force behind our weekly videos. Thank you.

Never has nine weeks seemed like nine years.

The last time we used this room was on March 15th. That seems like a lifetime ago. After our service on 3/15 the governor said that there could be no gatherings larger than 50 people and we haven't used this room since.

On March 15th, there were piles of uncertainties—no one knew the damage that the coronavirus would do to our nation and our world.

Today, on May 24th the restrictions are loosening up—but there are still piles of uncertainties—no one STILL knows the damage that the coronavirus will do to our nation and world.

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

We still don't know what is going to happen tomorrow.

One good thing about this era of the coronavirus—we are awakened from the delusional idea that we know what tomorrow holds.

We have no idea.

The News media has no idea.
The politicians have no idea.
The economists have no idea.
The physicians have no idea.
Social Media has no idea.

No one has any idea.

Here is the secret: We never knew what tomorrow holds. We just know that now more than ever. I hope one of the

effects of this quarantine is that we are less confident in tomorrow and more aware of today.

We still face piles of uncertainties.

There are things that may change forever in our nation. No one knows the effects this quarantine will have on us.

Was it the right thing?
Was it the wrong thing?

We all have our questions, but only time will tell.

How do we process these uncertain times?

So, what kind of church ought we to be as we face these piles of uncertainties?

There is much we don't know—so today we are going to overhear Paul talk to another church steeped in uncertainties.

“Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Center Church: how do we live in these uncertain days?

UNITED in Christ.

By rejoicing, Praying and being grateful.

PRAY

What are the activities of a UNITED church?

Rejoicing

Praying

Grateful

1. Rejoicing—

Rejoice always—

The only way that is possible is if our orientation is away from our circumstances and uncertainties and on him. In a way we are commanded to be happy. How is that possible?

Because we always have reason to rejoice.

Make no mistake, this does not mean that the circumstances of our lives will always be good. Not at all. This does not mean we have to pretend that bad things that happen to us are good.

“Happiness depends on happenings; joy depends on Christ.”

But our joy depends on Christ. When Paul is calling us to rejoice always he is not asking us to be delusional, but realistic.

If our eyes are on the shifting sands of our uncertainties we will be hounded by fear, worry, and anxiety. But the call for us is to look at our God and rejoice. Always, every day we have reason to rejoice.

We always have reason to rejoice.

The thing about rejoicing the Lord is that as you rejoice in who he is—what he has done for you what he is going to do for you—you will find strength.

This is a command—you must obey. There are no loopholes. There are no exceptions.

The reality is that you can't sit there and wonder if you will be joyful—but what you must realize is that you have to be.

Rejoice Always.

The only reason that we can hope to obey this is if we really do always have a reason to rejoice in the Lord. We do.

You will not always have a reason to rejoice:

- In your health

- Your mental state
- Your job
- Your marriage
- Your retirement
- Your bank account

But you will Always have reason to rejoice in the Lord.

The Bible is full of reasons but we will talk about two—

God loves us and sent his son for us.

God loved the rebellious world of men and women. And he did what none of us would have done in that situation. He gave up his most precious son. He sent him here not just to become a man, not just to die, but to become a man and be punished for our many sins.

No matter what is going on, or what uncertainties I face I can be certain that I will not face wrath for my sins. I have committed many. All of them have been transferred to his account.

God's love is expressed in and through Jesus. Dane Ortlund recently released a book about the disposition of Jesus to his people

“Jesus does not love like us. We love until we are betrayed. Jesus continued to the cross despite betrayal. We love until we are forsaken. Jesus loved through

forsakenness. We love up to a limit. Jesus loves to the end.” Dane Ortlund

He loves us and will not let us go. That helps so much. You know what it is like when you become aware of a sin and you think—I feel so dirty, so compromised, so unworthy, so unlovable.

In those moments we remind ourselves that the love of Jesus is greater than our feelings.

Rejoicing is the first activity of a UNITED church.

2. Pray without ceasing

This does not mean that all we do all the time is pray. But it means that we have a constant conversation with the Lord. It means we should be constantly talking to the Lord.

Talk to him. All the time.

Why without ceasing? Because we need that much help from him.

I always have a conversation going on in my head. I’m thinking about what happened, what is next, what might happen...I’m always thinking. It is never quiet up here.

I need to interrupt my internal conversation with to talk to the Lord. That is all prayer is. It is not some formal set of

words that have to be ordered just so or the Lord will be displeased.

If you doubt this—we have a whole book of prayers in the Bible—the Psalms.

Read them. I love the Psalms.

Every human emotion is bound up in the Psalms—

Grief

[16] Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.

[17] The troubles of my heart are enlarged;
bring me out of my distresses. Psalm 25:16–17

Confusion

“How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?

[2] How long must I take counsel in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?” Psalm
13:1–2

Contentment

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

[2] He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
[3] He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake." Psalm 23:1–3

Confidence

[1] The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

[2] When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.

[3] Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident. Psalm 27:1–3

Discouragement

“ Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?

Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation [6] and my God.” 42:5–6a

To pray without ceasing means we turn some of those internal musings to the Lord. None of us are as strong as we think we are. Here is an idea: Before you share your fears, concerns, joys or blessings with someone else, talk to the Lord.

What are the activities of a UNITED church?

Rejoice Always

Pray without Ceasing

“give thanks in all circumstances.”

3. Gratefulness

I am grateful for you all.

Here is something that has been clear to me—I hope it has been clear to you: Our building may have been closed—but our church was not.

- Kept in touch
- Texted that you were praying
- Found ways to serve
- Generous with your money
- Wanted to know of needs

You were the body of Christ even though we could not gather. I'm grateful.

One of the best things about this time was seeing how you served others without me or the leadership organizing anything. That is sweet to see. And experience.

I hope we all see how precious it is to gather as a church. We gather together NOT because we are uniform in our opinions but because we are united in Christ.

I wonder if gratefulness is one of the most overlooked of the Christian virtues. The NT pulsates to the rhythm of thankfulness, yet it seems that gratefulness in many quarters is derided as gullibility or Pollyannaish. A simple thought on gratefulness: Being grateful does not make one gullible or naive.

Many who foster suspicion and lob accusations can accuse the grateful as simpletons because don't freely share critiques to any open ear. A grateful Christian rings with the authentic tone of the gospel. It does not take less discernment to be grateful, but more.

It is not as if grateful people are unable to see weaknesses and problems but they choose to overlook those and instead focus the active power of grace. Gratefulness is the gospel in action.

Anyone can be a critic, but it takes a Christian to be grateful. Our world is coming apart at the seams as we hurtle toward Jesus' return. Even still, the Lord is working even in this dark place. When we see the shimmer of grace it is incumbent on us to celebrate it.

From the soil of gratefulness grows every Christian virtue. The grateful live closest to Jesus.

I want us to be grateful—more than that—God wants us to be grateful.

Are you grateful?

Some signs of the grateful—

Grateful people are better at remembering blessings from God than the slights of men.

Grateful people speak blessing to others more than spouting complaints at others.

The Grateful don't live as if they are owed from other but that they owe others.

The Grateful pray things different instead of trying to complain things different.

If you think God owes you, then you will think everyone else does too.

But we don't. Join us again in God's world where he does things in his way and in his time. Paul was grateful for this church that he had never been to.

How are we to emerge from this quarantine?

“Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

This is the will of God in Christ for us. In other words—

Because we are united to Jesus.

Because we are bound to him.

Because he is ours.

And we are his.

Each of us are in Christ.

This is why we have the hope of emerging from this quarantine united, even though we have been apart.

We are united in Christ, we are not uniform in all our opinions.

We emerge from this quarantine united.

There are uncertain days ahead. May we not focus on our differences. Nor our opinions, but on the fact that we are united in Christ.

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