

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
MINOCQUA, WI  
SERMON FOR MAY 2-3, 2021

*<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again: 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 petition, 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.*

*<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if anything is excellent, and if anything is praiseworthy, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> The things that you learned, received, heard, and saw in me: Keep doing these things. And the God of peace will be with you.*

(Philippians 4:4-9 EHV)

We live in an anxiety-ridden world. Anyone here ever get nervous? Anyone here ever worry about something? Anyone ever get anxious about the future? If I asked you to raise your hands, everyone would admit to this, 100%, except for anyone who's already fallen asleep (which is one thing that gives preachers anxiety).

Let me illustrate anxiety. I've got my phone, and it's open to the alarm clock. In fact, it's about to go off. I'm not kidding, it's about to go off. (Alarm goes off) That's not a very nice way to start the day, is it? An alarm clock? Why don't we call it the opportunity clock or the daily resurrection clock or the greet-your-day clock? No, we call it an alarm clock. "Alarm" means "an anxious awareness of danger." So when we wake up every morning with the dreaded sound of the alarm, it's like saying, "Danger, danger is coming. Run! Worry! Be anxious. Get nervous!"

That constant ringing of the alarm is what anxiety is like, only it keeps people on edge all day long and all night long and, well, all the time. One survey found that 40% worried about things that never happened, 30% worried about past events which were behind them, 12% worried about sickness even though they were healthy, 10% worried about other people, and only 8% worried about real problems confronting them. We must admit there are days we worry way too much and pray way too little.

Let's listen to the word of our Savior delivered through the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4. These verses are really the heart and soul of this letter, the theme of joy throughout the letter bursts into full bloom here. Together, let's find **JOY (even) IN ANXIETY**.

First, Paul says: Always rejoice. ***"Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near."*** (v. 4,5) in the verses just prior to these, Paul is trying to help two women named Euodia and Syntyche. They were not getting along. They were fighting and Paul tells them in no uncertain terms to knock it off and to get along with each other in the Lord. Imagine how these two ladies with their cat claws out felt while this was being read.

The key to getting along with people and not clawing them or even yourself is to ***"Rejoice in the Lord always!"*** The hardest person to get along with in your life is not your husband, not your wife, not your mom and dad, not your brother or sister, not your boss or cranky co-worker, not even the neighbor across the street who's mean to you. It is yourself. The more you rejoice in the Lord and his blessings, the less you'll be yanked around by sinful behavior in yourself and in other people.

The key words here are these: ***"The Lord is near."*** He's not just near mentally, or spiritually – in our minds and hearts like a pleasant memory. He's not just a phone call away. He's here, literally. He came near, he came here to this earth, physically to be with us, to be one of us – that OT name Immanuel, God with us.

Many people visualize a God who sits comfortably on a distant throne, remote, aloof, disinterested in the lives and needs of puny, petty, insignificant people like you and me. The Bible shows us a God who, while we

were still lost in the darkness of sin and unbelief and an eternal fate worse than death, took the initiative, rose from his throne, sent his Son, who set aside his glory, and offered himself as the sacrifice for all sin and the righteousness for all unrighteous lives. Our Savior died for us, rose again for us, revealed this to us by his Word, and gave us the faith to believe it. And in doing so, he fills us with joy. Joy that is ours regardless of circumstances – joy that can never be taken away. Joy that runs deep and true and forever. Rejoice Always. Always rejoice.

Secondly, Paul encourages: Always pray. ***“Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”*** (v. 6) Really? Don’t worry about anything? Anything? Nothing at all? That’s what he says. But what if I have a good reason, lots of reasons? Nope. You don’t. I don’t. But Paul doesn’t understand my life – the people in my life, the problems, the pitfalls. He doesn’t understand. Actually, he does. He’s in prison, unjustly, looking at possibly dying. He gets anxiety and worry and fear and nervousness.

But he isn’t any of those things because he looks outside of himself, he looks to God. ***“In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”*** Always go to God in prayer. And go to him with thanksgiving. Always. Lord, here’s what’s going on. Help me. Lord, thank you for my blessings. Thank you for your promises. Thank you for your power. Thank you for your presence.

When you are in conversation with God –speaking to him in prayer and listening to him through his Word – you are able to ***“not worry about anything.”***

Next, Paul encourages: Always find peace. ***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”*** (v. 7) God’s peace guards us. The peace of forgiveness won by Christ on the cross sets our minds and hearts at ease and gives us peace. This isn’t just peace from God, this is the peace God himself has, the serenity that characterizes God’s eternal state of mind. This is peace the world cannot give. This is peace the world cannot understand. But it’s yours in Christ. ***“Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** (Romans 5:1) It’s knowing that that Jesus our Good Shepherd not only has your back, he has all of you at all times. He says, “My sheep hear my voice, and no one will snatch you out of my hand.”

Martin Luther, referring to the sin of worry, wrote: ***"I have one preacher that I love better than any other on earth; it is my little tame robin, who preaches to me daily. I put some crumbs upon my window sill, especially at night. He hops onto the window sill when he wants his supply, and takes as much as he desires to satisfy his need. From there he always hops to a little tree close by, lifts up his voice to God and sings his carol of praise and gratitude, then tucks his little head under his wing, goes fast to sleep, and leaves tomorrow to care for itself. He is the best preacher that I have on earth!"***

Finally, always pursue purity. Think pure and God-pleasing thoughts and act in pure, God-pleasing ways. Paul communicates this quite powerfully: ***“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if anything is excellent, and if anything is praiseworthy, think about these things. The things that you learned, received, heard, and saw in me: Keep doing these things. And the God of peace will be with you.”*** (vv. 8-9)

What thoughts should we think? What things should we do? Rather than react to circumstances and worry and anxiety, look to Jesus. Look to God’s Word and find relentless, irrepressible joy in Jesus. Christian Family Solutions, a counseling agency affiliated with our church body, posted this picture to social media recently. It’s worth a look. “Things You Need to Tell Yourself.” These affirmations aren’t in mold of Al Franken’s Stuart Smalley on Saturday Night Live – He would say, “I’m good enough, I’m smart enough, and dog gone it people like me.” No, these affirmations all come from God’s Word.

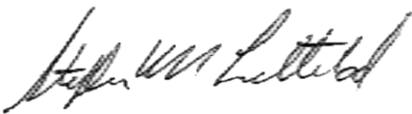
**You are fearfully and wonderfully made. You are valued. You are loved. You are strong. (in Christ) You are created beautiful by God. You are chosen. You have purpose. You are redeemed. You are forgiven.**

**You are capable. Your thoughts and feelings are valid. (If they're not in line with Christ and his Word, then adjust) You have hope and a future.**

All of these are in line with God's Word. Even better, get to know the Scriptures that say these things and commit them to memory. When anxiety comes upon you, when that inner alarm clock just keeps going off, it's easy to just give up and give in, to throw a pity party, to become absolutely consumed with the conflict, the person, the circumstance, to lose perspective. But Paul says, "There's a better way. Think of Jesus. Think of joy in Jesus. ***“Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if anything is excellent, and if anything is praiseworthy, think about these things.”***

Our minds are like a sponge. I can take this sponge and place it into a clean bucket of water and it will absorb the clean water. I can also take it and place it in a bucket of dirty water and it will absorb that water. Your mind can be used to absorb the things of this world or the things of God. Things which are pure and lovely will always bring us greater joy and peace of mind.

There are plenty of things to worry about, plenty of things that can give us anxiety and make us nervous. If we let them. If we spend time with them and look at them and obsess over them, anxiety will be the result. But we can have joy in the midst of anxiety, joy instead of anxiety, always, because we have Jesus. We have joy in Jesus. Joy that is ours regardless of circumstances – joy that can never be taken away. Joy that runs deep and true and forever. ***“The God of peace will be with you.”*** (v. 9b)

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen Luchterhand". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'S'.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand  
Minocqua, WI