

“Aligning our Hearts Cheerfully ”
series: *Aligning Our Hearts* (4 of 4)

a sermon based on

Deuteronomy 34:1-12 & 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

and delivered on

October 18, 2020

21th Sunday after Pentecost (Year A)
Reformation Sunday

at

Cherry Valley United Methodist Church

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Today, we are finishing up this sermon series *Aligning Our Hearts*. Although the context of this sermon series has been cool in our hearts to have a good relationship with God but also in our giving there is so much more to having our hearts put in the right place. I think it goes back to the very beginning in the garden. I mentioned this couple weeks ago that the story where the man and the woman are standing near that one tree that God had asked them to just stay away from. What happens is the serpent wiler than the other creatures tells them a lie. What was that lie? The lie that the serpent told was that God wanted to deprive them of something pleasant and which would make them happy. In fact, the lie said they God wanted to keep them from being like him. And yet when we hear the story of creation Genesis 1:26 we hear that God made humankind in his image male and female he created them in his image. God's intention from the beginning was that we would be like him. But it is this lie, that somehow or for some reason God what's the limit us.

it's a lie that people have bought into for millennia. Saint Paul talks about it repeatedly when he talks about his freedom from the law. He says the law is good but that it has been corrupted. He knows this because he was a pharisee who was one who focused so much on the rules as if God needed to be appeased rather and seeing our need as human beings to please God. I mean how often do we hear were perceived that the to be faithful or reverent is somehow to be dower and miserable? We treat going to church or serving our neighbor as a duty that interrupts are enjoyment of life. Isn't that often what people in the world think about Christians or religious people? That we just want to avoid any sort of pleasure because pleasure is somehow sinful?

There's actually an old joke about certain Christians that the reason they are opposed to premarital sex is because you know that could lead to dancing. even in our own heritage there was a time when Methodist avoided movies and dancing and playing car games or even board games. There was a reason for that because there is an Association with dancing is happening in saloons where people didn't go just to have a beer after work but squandered their paychecks or the idea that people only played cards in the context of gambling and we wanted to avoid those temptations that can lead us into dangerous places corrupted by lust and greed and gluttony.

But in the Bible, we find story after story about celebrations. A list of festivals to keep to the Lord. do we imagine that all those festivals were supposed to be dour occasions? Even Jesus fell victim to those insinuations. In Matthew 11:16-19, when he was addressing how some people just couldn't be pleased no matter what he said,

“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

John won't enjoy life so he must not love the Lord. Jesus spends too much time enjoying life and the company of all those who are made in God's image, so there must be something wrong with him. Some Christians still want to dismiss the fact that Jesus' first miracle (or at least the first recorded in Scripture) was to turn ordinary water into real wine (not grape juice but wine) so that a party celebrating a marriage could continue.

God is not displeased with our joy. Instead, he relishes it. He wants us to know joy in every part of our lives: in our play, in our work, in our worship, and in our giving. He gives us reason to be joyful – to be cheerful – even in the mundane.

Paul implores us to,

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again (he says,), 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 Christ Jesus.” (Pp 4:4-6)

But how are we to rejoice, when things just aren’t going our way?

I’m reminded of a story in which Mark Tidd describes this experience from his college years: It seems that an old man showed up, one day, at the back door of the house he and his buddies were renting. As they cracked open the door, they noticed that his eyes were glassy and that silvery stubble glittered on his furrowed face. He had with him a basket of unappealing vegetables, which he offered for sale. The young men being uneasy with this stranger made a hasty purchase to get the old man on his way.

But wouldn’t you know it – the old man returned the next week, and introduced himself as Mr. Roth, the man who lived in the shack down the road. Their fears subsided as they got close enough to realize that his glassy eyes were not the result of intoxication but of the cataracts that were blinding him. He began to make regular visits and they noticed the two mismatched right shoes that he wore. And yet when he’d visit bringing vegetables he’d sit and play old gospel tunes on his harmonica as they talked about vegetables and religion.

Then one day, Mr. Roth exclaimed, “The Lord is so good! I came out of my shack this morning and found a bag full of shoes and clothing on my porch.”

“That’s wonderful,” the young men responded. “We’re happy for you.”

“You know what’s even more wonderful?” he asked. “Just yesterday I met some people that could really use them.”¹

What filled Mr. Roth with joy and good cheer wasn’t what he lacked but finding just the right thing to give. 2 Corinthians 9:7 (which I referred to last week) says, “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” The reason God loves a cheerful giver, isn’t because he wants us to be happy about handing over what we hold dear, but to discover what it means to be like him, the one who would die on a cross so that we can have life.

When we give of ourselves – of our time – of our treasure – we rediscover that part of us... No, we discover that essential part of who and what we are that can’t help but fill us with joy.

They got in the mail a little later than planned but a letter with an estimate of giving card was sent out this week. As the letter says, this is only an estimate to help the church leadership plan for the upcoming year; but it’s also a good exercise for each of us as we reevaluate this part of our spiritual life. As you thoughtfully and prayerfully consider how God is inviting you to be a part of this ministry at Cherry Valley United Methodist Church (Or, if you’re watching on YouTube and belong to another church, think about it in the context of that faith community.) – as you align your heart enthusiastically and get yourself excited about the possibilities of our

¹ Craig Brian Larson, ed., *Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching from Leadership Journal* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993) p. 262.

ministry together – as you remember that this is an invitation that you get to choose, and not one that is imposed on you, ask yourself this question, “What do I need to give to be happy?” Really. Don’t ask, “How much can I give up and still be happy?” but ask yourself, “What do I need to give to be happy? When you do, I promise that even if that seems too far out there for now, when you make a plan to get there, God will not only provide the means, but will fill your heart with contentment and joy.

In that passage that Janet read earlier, Paul said to the church in Thessalonica,

“We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; (1 Th 1:2-5a)

I give thanks to God for all of you whom God has chosen remembering your works of faith and labors of love. AMEN.