

Rejoice in the Lord Always
May 31, 2026

Pastor Kristin Schultz
All Saints ABQ



Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice

This command is the centerpiece of our reading today
from Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Rejoice always. Give thanks and praise to God.
Do not be anxious about anything,
but bring everything to God in prayer with thanksgiving.
They are beautiful, encouraging words.

And we would be excused for thinking – rejoice always?
That's easy for you to say, Paul – you don't know what's going on here.
Federal support for vulnerable families shrinking.
Politicians not even bothering to hide their corruption.
Endless news about significant elections and their potential consequences.
On top of that, illness and pain in my family and my own body.
Anxiety for my future and my family's future.
What do you mean, rejoice always?

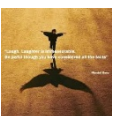
Then we remember.

Paul is writing this letter to the Philippians from prison.

Paul's circumstances are uncomfortable at best,
life-threatening at worst.

Yet Paul chooses to see in his imprisonment a chance to spread the gospel,
proclaiming the good news of Jesus to prison guards –
a captive audience to his preaching and, he says, a receptive one.

This is also why it's important to begin reading chapter 4 at the beginning –
not with Paul's exhortation to rejoice,
but with Paul's pointed words to Euodia and Synthyche,
who seem to be quarreling and causing drama in their community.
Paul again reminds them to be of the same mind of love and care for others;
to follow Christ's example of putting others above themselves.



The invitation to rejoice sounds different

in the context of struggling and suffering.

The ability to rejoice is not based on our circumstances being wonderful.

Paul's admonition is more like the poet Wendell Berry, who invites us to
"Be joyful, even though you have considered all the facts."

Paul writes, later in the letter,

I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.



And here Paul names the key to his, and our rejoicing.

God is near.

Our rejoicing is not a feeling we muster in response to our circumstances, but a choice we make in response to God's presence.

It is a response to the grace of God at work in our lives and in the world.

Such joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit –
the Spirit of Christ at work in us.

New Testament professor Carla Works writes that

Joy, for Paul, is not a feeling that is dependent upon circumstances. It is a theological act. It is choosing to reflect on God's actions to redeem the cosmos even when all the present circumstances might indicate that some other power had won.

To rejoice always is to make a choice to live in gratitude and praise;
to make a choice to see God's work of redemption in the world
alongside all that makes us anxious and angry.

It is to say, along with the psalmist,

I believe I shall see the goodness of God in the land of the living,
and to take courage from that goodness.

New Testament professor Jane Lancaster Patterson writes that Paul offers practical help for life in an anxious age. She translates and expands that advice in contemporary language:

- Rejoice: Don't just expect joy to arrive on its own, but commit yourself to practices of godly joy every day (4:4).
- No one is at their best right now, including you, so be gentle to absolutely everyone (4:5).
- Christ is near (4:5). Take moments to experience the reality that you are surrounded by transcendent compassion that is larger and deeper than you.

- Don't obsess over your worries, but don't brush them under the carpet, either. Share them with God, all the worry and all the gratitude together (4:6).
- This conversation with God is a source of peace beyond our capacity to understand (4:7).
- Commit yourself not to simply obsess over all that is going wrong, all the evil and destruction you see in the world. Turn your attention to things that really matter, to where you see action that is worthy of respect, to places where justice is being done, to goodness in all its forms. Make a list of them if you have to (verse 4:8 says, literally "tally up these things,").
- Pay attention to the truly remarkable people around you who will show you how to walk this path (4:9).



Paul says that living in this way –
 looking for reasons to rejoice and give thanks,
 bringing all our anxieties to God in prayer –
 will bring the gift of peace.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
 will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

To be honest, friends, I have struggled with this one.

Throughout my life, I have struggled with depression,
 and long to feel that peace of God which passes understanding.

I think my struggle for peace is closely linked to my need for control and certainty.

For instance, recently I've been struggling with how to be a parent
 to young adult children.

When I'm pretty sure I know best about some things,
 but have to let them make their own decisions and mistakes.

When I worry about them – but realize so much of my worry is caught up in
 whether they will fulfill my hopes and expectations for their lives.

When I can let go and realize that they are in God's hands,
 and by God's grace they will continue to grow into the people God
 created them to be, then I know peace.

For a few minutes at a time.

Another example.

Last summer I went on a retreat called Soul Revival,
 and for me, it was just exactly that.

I arrived for the first evening gathering and the words on the board were,
 "Mother Mary, Mother Earth, Mother God,"

and I knew I was in the right place.
I'd arrived filled with anxiety about next steps – for myself, for All Saints –
and as I walked around the beautiful Oregon grounds that evening,
the music coming from the chapel repeated these words:
I will trust the path laid out in front of me.
And suddenly I was filled with a sense of peace – of trusting that I don't need to find a
next path, but that I was (and am) walking that path I need to be on.

For me, God's peace is experienced in moments such as these.
I don't dwell for days and weeks in a sense of peace,
but the moments are enough to fill me and keep me in hope.
The moments of God's peace are gifts of grace that give me courage to continue,
and hope to rejoice, even in the midst of struggle and worry.

To rejoice in our relationship with Christ and our trust in God
does not mean we turn a blind eye to suffering in the world.
It does not mean we minimize injustice or despair.
It is an invitation to live in joy and peace that are a gift of God's grace,
a result of the beauty and redemptive action going on all around us,
despite the circumstances that make us anxious.

We can use the words of Paul as a sort of mantra to give us courage and hope
in the midst of challenges:
Rejoice, don't be anxious, pray, and peace will be with us.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen