

Philippians 2:1-13 (NIV) ~ If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Come to the Table of Joy

Have you ever had the feeling that some relationships get off to a rocky start before you have even had a chance to make a positive impression? Now retired Bishop Will Willimon tells such a story about the very first church he served. The story begins when Willimon was a student at Emory University, and, following the directions of the District Superintendent, he went out to the church to meet with the lay leader before he began serving as their pastor. He arrived prior to the Lay Leader at the little one-room church, then named, “Friendship Methodist Church.” Since he was early, he thought he would go inside and look around. But, he was surprised to find a big padlock and chain barring the front door.

When the Lay Leader arrived, Willimon said, “I’m glad you are here to open the lock on the door.” “Oh, that isn’t our lock. The sheriff put that there,” explained the Lay Leader. “Things got rough here at the meeting last month. Folks started yelling at one another, carting off furniture they had given to the church. So, I called the sheriff and he came out here and put that lock on the door until the new preacher could get here and settle ‘em down.” Yes, that was at “Friendship Methodist Church!”

Well, things were not much better in the first century when new followers of Jesus were forming Christian congregations. People just could not seem to get along. Most of the epistles, or letters, of the New Testament were written to these young congregations in order to instruct, guide, and encourage them to stop their bickering and give a united witness for Christ. We do not know the particular problems of First Church Philippi that spurred the writing of today’s text, but we can easily read between the lines and guess that there was at least a power struggle and plenty of disunity. And while we realize that these kinds of disagreements, controversies, lack of unity are found in any group of human beings, it still saddens us, as it saddened Paul, to know that negative human tendencies even permeate the church of Jesus Christ.

And so Paul implores the Philippians, *“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then **make my joy complete** by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*

That is a tall order....unless the members of the body of Christ are completely committed to living in the love, grace, peace, and joy of a Christ-like attitude. Now, we are hearing about what would make Paul's joy complete. Have you ever thought about what would make Jesus' joy complete?? I always thought that we should follow the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) with, "and What Would Make Jesus' Day?" (WWMJD) Shouldn't we be living with the desire to bring a thrill to the one who gave his very life for us? Shouldn't we be the delight of the one who forgives our sins and desires for us to spend eternity with him? What would make Jesus' joy complete?

Today, as we celebrate World Communion Sunday, it is amazing to consider that Christians all over the world are being invited to a sharing of the sacrament of Christ's self-giving love. That invitation is being delivered in a variety of ways. We, today, are invited to Come to the Table of Joy. Whose joy? Our joy? Jesus' joy? We should be filled with joy as every sin is wiped clean and every barrier to eternal life is destroyed by the power of the resurrection. That is our joy this day. But what would make Jesus' joy complete, even at this table?

The population of earth changes faster than I can talk. But when I checked the Worldometer population count at 2:14 pm yesterday, the population was exactly 7,570,002,883 persons. Wouldn't it make Jesus' joy complete to have 7,570,002,883 places set at the Table of Joy? So, what are we doing to get a little closer to that goal?

Paul gives simple instructions: We should *be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...*

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, asked, "*Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences.*"

I believe that even striving for such unity of love, heart, purpose, and faith will heighten the joy in the heart of our Savior, as well as within the church and in the experience of every individual touched by the witness of the church. That kind of joy is infectious, you know. It is like watching a baby giggle ~ the onlookers cannot help but to smile. When we see another's pure joy in loving and serving Christ, well, that spreads like a smile as well. There is no need to withhold joy! May it shine radiantly, that all may see, experience, and know our joy in loving Jesus Christ.

So, on behalf of the risen Christ, I invite you to:

Come to the Table of Joy!

Come to the Table of Joy!

Come to the Table of Joy!

This is God's Table, it's not yours or mine.

Come to the Table of Joy!