

Sermon, August 8, 2021
Ephesians 5:15-20 & John 6:51-58
“What’s So Amazing about Grace? Grace Brings Joy”
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As a moment of privilege this morning, I want to thank all of those here who are now or have been in any part of the medical profession. Doctors, nurses, technicians, pharmacists, administrators, maintenance, and custodial help. We are indebted to you for your ministry

And what a difficult profession and ministry to be in. You often see people when they are not at their best. And yet you still endeavor to help them. And what I mean by that is sometimes it takes a while to diagnose a problem. And not every treatment works for every problem, and so they go back again. There have been many times when I've visited someone in the hospital or in their home and they complain about their Doctor's plan for them that I've counseled them be patient. It takes time. Certainly you need to be your own advocate but working with them healing takes time.

And I know when you aren't well that's easier said than done. When we are sick or injured, we want to be better. We don't want to wait. We want to not be sick or not hurt right now. And it can make us irritable and impatient.

I had a good friend who injured her back because she missed the last step on the stairs going into her basement. She stumbled, fell, and experienced debilitating pain. The pain got so bad she couldn't work. She was no longer able to perform the duties of her job. She was in constant pain, it affected her

relationships, as you can imagine. It made sleeping or sitting in a chair close to impossible. It was just a miserable experience for this person.

All of her doctors worked hard to diagnose and figure out a plan for her. A part of the plan involved giving her medicine to control the pain so she could function. What she discovered was that while she was glad to have some relief, it kept her from being cautious, and she would reinjure or make the injury worse. That's a difficult place to be in. I remember her at one point saying, I'm tired of dealing with the symptoms, i.e. the pain. I want to treat the problem and fix what is causing the pain.

Eventually, they were able to do just that. But what she said stuck with me. I don't want to treat the symptoms, I want to treat the problem. That seems to be a pretty good way to deal with not just physical pain, but lots of things in life. How much better in the long run would our lives be if we said *I don't want to focus on the symptoms, I want to focus on the problem*. So why don't we?

Well, I think in the end it's easier. We deal with the symptoms because they are more immediate. They can be so immediate that we can confuse them for being the real problem. And if we focus on the symptoms and deal with them., it helps us mask having to deal with the real issue. *If I can mask the pain, I don't have to deal with the problem*. Think of a physical problem. I commend this person for wanting to deal with the problem to the symptoms because many of us would rather do the opposite. We'd rather mask the pain than deal with the problem. I'd rather take the shot, take the pills, than have surgery and undergo months of physical therapy. If I can mask the pain, I don't have to deal with the problem.

And this is, in many ways, exactly what Paul refers to in our passage of Scripture from Ephesians. Paul isn't necessarily saying that we should abstain from alcohol. What he is pointing out is that some have used alcohol to mask their pain. They have a lack of joy in their lives. And a lack of true joy, not just an adrenaline filled moment that happens, but true sustained joy experienced even in the monotonous moments of life, can be incredibly difficult to deal with. And rather than looking at their lives and asking themselves *why do I not have any joy?* it's easier to be the symptom and mask the pain with alcohol. It makes me forget, it helps me to not have to deal with my problems for a little while, it intensifies my emotions. And for a little while, I don't have to deal with my real pain. And let's be honest, some days when you are drudging through with no joy, doesn't the idea of not having to deal with it, forgetting it for a while, isn't that active? Sure, we get it.

Now, many of you, I hope most of you, are able to say to say *thank goodness that's not my problem*. My answer to that would be "well, praise God! I am glad you don't do that". But then I might ask you this question, *if it's not alcohol, what are you using? What are you using to escape the lack of joy in your life?* People use all sorts of things, you know. Sometimes we become workaholics not because we love work but

because if I focus on work, I don't have to deal with my real problems and a lack of joy in my life. Some immerse themselves in hobbies. Now, it is helpful to step away from your problems and do something you enjoy. It allows us to come back to our problems with a fresh perspective. In that instance, hobbies can be very godly. But if you are using them so you don't have to deal with your problems and masking the lack of real joy, that's a problem, isn't it?

Oh, we can use all sorts of things, television, entertainment. Some will use pornography, others, food. social media. Some people will even use the church. Did you know that? I've met people over the years who confessed to me they are at church all the time, involved in everything because at least while I'm here I don't have to think about this situation at home with my spouse, kids, work, whatever. Now, church involvement is critical for our spiritual well-being. But not if it's being used to mask our problems and hide from our lives. The list is endless. So here's a bit of a rule of thumb. I won't say it's exact, but if you have something in your life that you find yourself doing so you can forget. If you are involved in these activities and you tend to, on a regular basis, lose all track of time, it could be a problem.

So what, then, is the solution to this problem? Well, Paul talks about that, as well. Paul brings us Good News. Paul says look, I know the temptation is to mask your problems and not have to deal with them seems attractive, but I want you to know you don't have to do that. If you will allow God to pour out His amazing grace on you, you won't have to mask your pain anymore He will bring you joy. We've been talking over the past several weeks about the Amazing Grace of God. Today, Paul says God's grace can free us, give us strength and joy. He can deal with your problems and not just the symptoms. God's grace can make all the difference.

That's why Paul says here is why would you choose masking your problems which only makes things worse when you can experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life? Why mask your problems when the Holy Spirit can bring you joy. Bring resolution, give you the strength to deal with your problems, provide answers, fill your life with hope? Why choose something that will enslave you when you can choose the One by who's grace you can be set free?

When we do this, one of the joyous things we discover is that rather than be enslaved to things in life, we can actually enjoy them. When I'm not using food to escape my problems, I discover how much better a meal is. I discover the joy a good meal can be when I am with loved one or friends. When work is not a place to escape, it becomes a place where I can do ministry. I find the balance where I don't have to be working all the time. When my hobbies aren't my escape, I find just how much joy they can bring.

This morning, I'd like to invite you to bring whatever it is that you've used to escape and leave them at the altar. Say to God I want You, I want Your Holy Spirit, I want Your joy. I want to deal with the problem and

not satisfy myself with masking the pain any longer. When we do, we experience what the disciples did out on the water. In the midst of the storm, Jesus walks to them. Walks on the water. While the storm still rages. Once Jesus shows up, John doesn't talk about the storm any longer. As if to say when Jesus comes with us, our storms really don't matter very much. They become a non-entity. How powerful and glorious. Can Jesus in His grace bring you joy? Amen.