

**Philippians 4: 4-7 “Spiritual Home Improvement” Rev. Janet Chapman
12/15/24 (11:15 Worship Service)**

We live in a DIY generation as Tim reminded me by his bravery in fixing his car and air compressor (?) when they were broken. Home Depot, Lowe’s and other companies specialize in selling products to people who want to do projects themselves. Their slogans inspire confidence in people that they can do it on their own! Lowe’s slogans have included “Let’s Build Something Together” to “Never Stop Improving” to its current slogan “Do it Right for Less.” Home Depot, their chief competitor, has included “You can do it, we can help!”, “More Saving, More Doing,” “Let’s Do This!” and now “How Doers Get More Done.” I never paid much attention to such things until my niece went into the advertising business in New York and now slogans and marketing approaches are a big part of her wheelhouse.

You can look at Philippians 4: 6, “Don’t be anxious about anything,” as a sort of home improvement slogan. You can read it and psyche yourself up for the tough times – “Let’s do this! Let’s do it right and never stop improving!” No anxiety! Who needs it anyway? I’m a competent adult... most days. I just need to slow down a bit, breathe deeper, summon more faith, and I will achieve the anxiety-free life Paul talks about here. I can be happy, like Pharrell Williams sings about... don’t worry, be happy. To have a happy home, to improve your life, just get it done. It’s that simple... or so they say. I remember when my ex-husband decided to try and fix his car once. We were in our first apartment, our first year of marriage, and he decides he can replace a car part on his own rather than call somebody. I came outside while he was working and remember seeing car parts strewn all over the parking lot. He was staring at them intently. I said, “What’s the matter?” He said, “I can’t remember what goes back where.” Thus began a series of mishaps and arguments in our marriage about what can

be fixed on our own and what can't. It also started a long list of things he promised me he would never do again including plumbing, electrical fixtures, retainer walls, carpentry, and so on. To this day, however, he still builds computers as a side gig but not any that I will use. More often than not, there is great value in knowing your limitations and being willing to call someone to handle the tough jobs. I recently got a new roof, but I would have never considered having an amateur do the job; I also had to get a new HVAC system the same year and as much as I would have liked to save money by installing it myself, that would have been a disaster.

Some folks swear by those DIY training sessions on YouTube for everything, but preacher Alyce McKenzie reminds us that it is important to recognize that moment when we have come to the end of our abilities, and thus need to seek out help from others. We need that self-awareness to know that moment and so many of us simply haven't learned that skill. Maybe the best home improvement slogan to keep homes from chaos and reduce arguing would be "Call Somebody!" In reading our scripture, I wonder if maybe that's the motto that needs to replace "Let's do this!" especially when it comes to being free from worries and anxiety while tapping into joy which is far more profound than being happy. I have learned I need to call somebody because in my quest to never stop improving, there are so many moments that I just haven't "got this." And Paul tells me who to call, immediately after telling us not to worry about anything. Being released from anxiety isn't a human achievement, it is a gift from God that we are told is available thru prayer, not a once in a while prayer but steady and consistent prayer. It is true that I can psyche myself up for other situations in life but being worry-free requires God's help. Accessing the kind of joy that Paul is encouraging in this text won't get

done no matter how skilled of a doer I might be. I need God to bring that peace and joy to my soul.

It may seem a bit odd that Paul's advice to us about joy was written in prison, at a moment when he doesn't even know whether he will be freed or will undergo martyrdom. Yet it is precisely in that moment that Paul discovers the secret of Christian joy, a joy that comes with a peace which passes all understanding, and he shares it with us. Thus, we get a glimpse into the kind of joy Paul is teaching about – it is not based on favorable circumstances such as whether we are surrounded by friends, have a desirable future ahead of us, have a rewarding job, or so on. In those cases, it would be hard to rejoice “always” because life leads us into dark valleys just as much as amazing mountaintops, into rough paths as well as smooth.

Henry Ward Beecher once said, “A person without joy is like a wagon without springs: They are jolted disagreeably by every pebble in the road.” In our letter to the city of Phillippi, Paul is talking about a kind of joy that comes from the Divine and therefore will never fail. It consists of being in communion with the risen Christ, in communication with God, and as notoriously unpredictable as the Divine One who gives it. C.S. Lewis reminds us that where pleasure is often within our power, joy never is, making it truly a gift from God to be received willingly but not passively. It isn't meant to be set on a shelf like that sneaky Elf on a shelf that appears this time of year. Nor is it an act of divine intervention that suddenly makes all things right, at least from our perspective. It is a joyful peace that pushes the limits of our imaginations, challenging us to constantly reconsider what it is that makes for peace, for whom, and how. Because God's imagination is so much larger than ours. Additionally, whether Paul lives or dies, whether others shower him with affection or praise or instead compete with him as rivals, it is all the same to Paul, from the standpoint of his

relationship with Christ which surpasses everything. He has learned to be satisfied, even though conditions are horrible around him, and it is through that sense of joyful peace, Paul is able to influence and effect change to improve the lives of others.

Paul teaches that this state of being comes only through prayerful and grateful acknowledgment of one's dependence upon God. The Philippians can be free from anxiety because the Lord is near. They can call on God in prayer and with thanksgiving as a worthy alternative to anxiety and worry. "Let's do this!" is not a great slogan for that spiritual side of home improvement if we take it as a call to banish our anxieties by sheer will power; we will never ultimately succeed by our own efforts to rid ourselves of worry. "Let's do this" can be a great slogan for spiritual home improvement if we think of it as God through Christ speaking to us in the midst of our anxieties. So that when we grow tired of that endless struggle to master our own anxieties by summoning our inner resolve, let's acknowledge that we've come to the end of our human abilities and need to call for help. There is One who stands by ready and willing to do this with us and do it right. Let's make a promise to ourselves and the world this day to call that one and only Somebody who excels at home improvement!