**Sermon 7/21/19**

**Philippians 3:17- 4:1 & 4:4-13**

Philadelphia hosted a "Values through Sports" mentoring program

              for children on Saturdays.

One morning, Jeremy, a dedicated staff member, noticed an 8 year-old girl sitting

            all by herself, while the other children were engaged in a variety of activities.

He had not seen her before, and she was obviously hesitant

            about joining in with the others.

He went over to her and introduced himself, and she told him her name was Latisha.

He asked about her family.

"Mommy goes in and out of the hospital to make herself well." (translate: rehab).

               Daddy had to go away for a long time.  (translate: prison).

                                        My grandmom takes care of us now."

As they talked, he discovered her grandmother scraped by

            to keep 6 children fed and clothed.

Latisha was wearing bedroom slippers and torn jeans.

Obviously there were no luxuries in that home.

Jeremy asked Latisha what she did with her time.

She told him about playing with her brothers and sisters and Jesus.

Puzzled he asked what she meant by playing with Jesus.

She said, "Well, sometimes my brothers and sisters don't want to play with me,

                  and I don't want to be alone,

                 so I pretend Jesus is there with me and we play together."

He asked her if she had any games or toys.         She didn't.

She said it would be nice to have a few, but she wouldn't want too many.

This surprised him because he thought there was no such thing as too many toys.

So he asked "Why?" She answered, "If I had too many toys to play with,

             I might stop playing with Jesus and I think that would make him sad."

We can learn much from Latisha.

Perhaps most of us have too many toys, and possessions,

             to truly appreciate the presence of Jesus in our lives.

And that does make him sad.

Paul loved the Philippians urged them to follow his example

             and set their minds on heavenly things rather than earthly things.

He wrote: I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

            I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.

            I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation,

                  whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty, or in want.

          I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

He reminded them to stand firm in the Lord. And rejoice in the Lord always.

Let your gentleness be evident to all.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,

             will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

Whatever you have learned, or received, or heard, from me, or seen in me, —

           put it into practice.

Let others see your

           compassion and love, mercy and humility, forgiveness and generosity,

           so they can discover God's great love for them.

And the God of peace will be with you,

       a peace which exceeds all understanding,

       and keeps our hearts and minds safe,

       even amidst the greatest torment –

       the worst this world can throw at us.

Even while he was in prison, constantly facing the possibility of execution,

          Paul cared about these Philippians so much,

         he struggled to teach them to live as children of God.

He wanted them to experience God's loving presence with them.

During World War II, part of the United States was occupied by the enemy.

Some of Alaska's Aleutian Islands were held by Japanese troops.

In order to supply the war effort, the United States government

        hastily built the Alaska Highway through the Canadian Rockies.

Some years after the war ended, the Alcan Highway opened to the public.

Little had changed along its 1523 miles of dirt, mud, ruts,

         and treacherous snaking curves through the mountains.

Shortly after being opened to the public, someone posted the following sign:

        “Choose your rut carefully. You will be in it for the next 1500 miles.”

Good advice for those who traveled that rough road.

Good advice for all us during our life on earth.

We are able to choose our own rut –

           we will travel the rut we choose throughout our lives.

If we choose wisely, we will choose God's way, and travel with Jesus.

Jesus told us over and over that the Kingdom of God

            is to be greatly treasured, and brings us great joy.

The word "Joy" in the New Testament Greek refers to:

             gladness, bliss and celebration.

But I actually like the Hebrew word for "Joy" which means:

           to leap, or spin around with pleasure.

We can begin to experience this sense of joy and happiness

          when we recognize God as joyful.

God is not some stern taskmaster,

         He is the God of the universe with a smile on His face.

The Bible says: The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save.

        He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love,

        He will rejoice over you with singing.

Imagine, God delights in you, and breaks out into song when He thinks about you!

The Lord himself is exulting over you in happy song.

That is much better than traveling in a rut of worry and anxiety.

Said the Robin to the sparrow,

           I should really like to know,

          why these anxious human beings rush about and hurry so.

Said the sparrow to the Robin,

          Friend, I think that it must be,

          that they have no Heavenly Father, such as cares for you and me.

We can live letting our problems and worries overwhelm us.

Or, we can live remembering we do have a Heavenly Father,

          and His love brings joy into our lives.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation,

            by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,

          will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Have you ever faced a problem you thought would top them all?

In Budapest, a Jewish man went to his rabbi and complained,

           "Life is unbearable for my family and me.

           There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?"

The rabbi thought about it for a moment and answered,

         “Take your goat into the room with you.”

The man was overwhelmed, but the rabbi insisted:

          “Do as I say and come back in a week.”

A week later the man came back looking even more upset than before.

          “We cannot stand it," he told the rabbi. "The goat is filthy.”

The rabbi then told him, "Go home and let the goat out. Come back in a week."

A week later, the man returned all excited and he exclaimed,

            "Life is beautiful. We enjoy every minute of our lives now.

             There is no goat – just the nine of us."

Our worries and problems can quickly rob today of our joy and peace.

Sometimes we simply have to put the goat out.

Our problems still exist, but we do not have to let them take first place.

They do not have to rob us of our joy.

Corrie Ten Boom used to say:

           "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow,

           it empties today of its strength."

We do have a Heavenly Father who loves us, and rejoices in us.

We have the love of God and that brings about a Joy unlike any other.

AMEN