

Joy to the World!

It may have been around this time of year that I was talking on the phone with my buddy, Randy. I mentioned that he sounded a bit depressed. "If you're not just a bit depressed, then you're not paying attention," came his reply. After a quick mental rundown of all the bad things going on in the world—at least the ones I could name—I had to admit, Randy had a good point.

It's Christmas time--it's the season to be joyful! But I just found out that my lettuce might kill me. Besides, it doesn't feel right to be happy when so many people are displaced by fire and flood and on and on.... What's a person to do? Here's my prescription—use one of two approaches. If either of these methods are followed with discipline and desire, then I promise peace and joy can be yours.

First (offered somewhat tongue-in-cheek) is denial. Yep, that good old head-in-the-sand way of feeling OK. In a pinch this approach can be used by anyone. It is the easiest and least demanding of my two methods, because it requires very little effort. If paying attention to the bad things happening around you is taking your joy away, then stop paying attention. Unfortunately, there is a down side--the joy you obtain is fragile. If anyone starts to talk to you about current events during the holidays, you may need to plug your ears with your fingers and run away while shouting the first verse of "Away in a Manger."

The second technique is something I call "Prayer with Thanksgiving." I'd like to claim that I figured this out on my own, but it comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:4-7). God's peace brings a joy that can't be taken away.

Paul isn't telling us to ignore the world around us. Rather, he tells us to take, *everything with thanksgiving* to God. Paul assumes that we know what's going on. In other words, be informed, but not anxious. I think it's OK to watch the news and read the paper, but when it starts to make us anxious, I think we should stop and *pray with thanksgiving*.

Prayer with Thanksgiving even works with job-related stress. Have a deadline looming just before Christmas? Give it a try. We aren't promised that we get what we request, but we are promised the peace of God. You'd be surprised how much you can get done when peace reigns instead of panic.

Do you have big problems? It seems that the bigger the problem, the more effective is Prayer with Thanksgiving. For example, family.... I know family dynamics can be a real Christmas joy-killer (I often say that our family put the "fun" in dysfunction). But you'd be surprised how much peace can come into a family when we stop praying about how big a problem someone is and start to pray with thanksgiving for each other.

Well, that's my advice for a Joyful Christmas. If you already have joy, then keep it. If not, then get it. I recommend Prayer with Thanksgiving.

See you in church, --pastor tony