HOW TO BE A JOYFUL COURAGEOUS FOLLOWER OF JESUS

Scriptures: Philippians 4: 1 – 9

At a licensing service held at our congregation my District Executive said the following to the candidates:

“We have accomplished everything that we had set out to do. We are now ready to do what God wants us to do.” David Shumate at Sam Light’s licensing service. 1.22.12.

I suspect that in this Annual Conference we have accomplished everything that we had set out to do, and we are ready to do what God wants us to do. Let us therefore take a quick look backwards at the words of Jesus. The very last words that He shared with his followers: Matt. 28: 19-20 gwt. “So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to do everything I have commanded you. ‘And remember that I am always with you until the end of time.”

Absolute authority was given to Jesus by the Father (1 Cor. 15: 27-28 gwt).
“Clearly, God has put everything under Christ’s authority. When God says that everything has been put under Christ’s authority, this clearly excludes God, since God has put everything under Christ’s authority.

But when God puts everything under Christ’s authority, the Son will put himself under God’s authority, since God had put everything under the Son’s authority. Then God will be in control of everything.”

Those who would become followers of Jesus do so based on their personal decision to follow Jesus. And that decision is one’s life faith statement recognizing that when He comes, Jesus comes to stay. When the God of this world comes into our lives he is present for the long haul. Jesus the Christ views the long haul as eternity. His presence on the earth was not just that of a Savior but Jesus was without question a teacher. His disciples called Him ‘teacher.’ Then and now Jesus comes to teach. What has Jesus been teaching the past several years? Jesus has come to reveal truth. The truth of the Father which the Christ has now entrusted into the hands of His followers is the very truth which confronts us today.
In the words of our text today the apostle Paul, servant of God provides for the church a ringing affirmation of divine truth. He calls us to a life of joy, not happiness but joy. Happiness is dependent upon the external circumstances in our lives. Joy on the other hand is the internal expression fostered by the presence of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of one’s life.

At times you have given me cause to smile when I hear you drop those names of persons who have been foundational pillars in the denomination or historically have been well known among the Brethren. I am tempted to drop a few of those names but if I do I will leave out a bunch and some of you would go home rather sad. But, I hear those names and I think of my name, “Frederick” do you know anyone else in the denomination with the last name Frederick? When you start dropping names as you reach back into history or you circle your own family members today, it only reminds me that I am here by the grace of God and I smile. Oh by the way some of you have got to learn to smile. When you smile it relaxes the muscles in your face and it saves you the cost of those Botox treatments. One of the reasons I
look so much younger than I am is that I do smile. Even with persons I do not know when I see them I smile and across the years it has done wonders for me and I won’t need Botox treatments for another thirty years.

Twenty seven years ago when I was being introduced to the church via the Western Plains District I was present at a District Board Meeting in McPherson, Kansas and an official from the head quarters in Elgin was present. In that meeting he asked me; “Do you think you will make a good Brethren?” What a question! I simply responded, “If I am a good follower of Jesus Christ, I would be the best Brethren ever.” That marked the end of that conversation. Twenty seven years later I am still working on being a good follower of Jesus Christ and still working on being the best Brethren not with-standing the name Frederick. Stafford Charles Frederick, doesn’t get any more British than that does it?

So how then do I become a joyful, courageous follower of Jesus Christ? Over the past year at the encouragement of our moderator we have been gently nudged into the reading and study of the book of Philippians. During the past five days or so we have been reminded of the message of this letter
from the Apostle Paul to the Church of Jesus Christ. He is in prison chained to a guard and it is obvious that the Spirit of joy flows in and out of his life.

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The book of Philippians has four chapters and in these four chapters he mentions the word joy or joyful a total of sixteen times must be pretty important if he mentions a word sixteen times.

As has been previously sited this week “joy” is a major theme of the letter to the Philippians. In the very first chapter Paul calls the church to rejoice, and the reason is significant. Look at chapter one, verse three and following: “I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.
So now I call your attention to chapter four and once again he mentions or emphasizes the need for joy in the life of the follower of Jesus Christ.

How do I become a joyful courageous follower of Jesus?

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I. I must first of all be a follower of Jesus the Christ.

Romans 15: 13 The Message “Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!”

When transformation comes into our lives it must be a joyful change. I have read the end of the story and we win in the end. You have everything for which to be joyful. Yes, the foundation for all joy in the Christian’s life is Jesus the Christ. The foundation for all joy in the Brethren life must be Jesus the Christ.

Matthew 28: 18-20: Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make people from all nations into disciples.” The reminder which comes from Jesus to you the church that real and lasting joy comes to all who would receive them into their lives.

Are you a follower of Jesus? Have you committed your life to Jesus?
II. I must pray for my fellow followers of Jesus the Christ.

The last word in the tag line is significant, “Continuing the work of Jesus, Peacefully, Simply, Together.” Together reminds us to be in prayerful support of each other.

1 Thess. 5: 16 niv, “Be joyful always, v. 17 Pray continually, v. 18, give thanks in all circumstances for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Today “The world is certainly different, if not more complicated, than it was in 1945. Peter Kuzmic is quoted as saying that the most defining word of our time is the word ‘post.’ We live in a post-Christendom, post-Enlightenment, post-western, post-denominational; post-literate, post-Cold War, and post-modern world. I guess you could say we minister in a “post-everything” generation. (From inaugural speech by Dr. David Busic president of NTS. (NTS Connection 2011 Annual Issue). Could it be said of us that we are in a post-prayer world. I have been a follower of Jesus long enough to know that prayer is one of those activities that just does not excite the church. I am not guessing, I know.
It is necessary that our prayer life in and out of the church moves to a place of significance. The disciples who saw all that Jesus did in the three or so years they were with Him asked that He teach them one thing: “Lord teach us to pray.”

III. I must follow and serve Jesus with courage.

There is encouragement from the Savior himself, John 15: 10-11 niv, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love... I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

Reminds me of that old chorus, “I have a joy, joy, joy down in my heart. Where? Down in my heart…”

3 John 4, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

As we return to our local congregations the challenge is for us to make decisions that will last throughout eternity. Decisions like inviting persons to commit their lives to following Jesus. Decisions like establishing prayer support for the daily ministry of your congregation. Sometimes in life we make decisions that prove to be very tragic for our earthly existence. It was
my first visit to the island of Jamaica and my brother took me to visit the famed Dunn’s River Falls. It was a beautiful day with tourists visiting the lovely beach and folk going up and down the falls making sure that their steps didn’t take them to the bottom faster than they intended sliding down the rocks with bruised arms and legs.

We were standing on the observation landing the first one up from the beach, watching those who were just having a fun filled day.

A group of college age tourists from the US was making their way up the falls and having an enjoyable time.

When they got to the place in the falls that’s directly across from where we were two of the young men decided to move to the middle and attempt to climb the big rock as opposed to walking up on the sides where the water flows naturally. Beneath them was a pool formation engineered by the water falling on that part of the rock over the years.

One of the young men decided that he could not climb up the way they were going and so eased by to the side where the footing was much safer.
The other young man was still trying to climb the rock. I looked over to my brother and said, “He’ll never make it.”

Other members of his group were standing around the pool chatting and laughing.

The young man on the rock suddenly decided to turn and dive down into the pool which could not have been more than about four or five feet if that much. When he did silence fell on the climbing party. Instinctively I knew he wasn’t coming back up and I called for one of them to “Get his head up.” No body moved and I screamed again, “Get his head up out of the water.” One of the young men reached down lifted his upper body out of the water, and the back portion of this young man’s head floated off like a cap and blood was escaping his head like a “water” fall. I later learned that this 21 year old young man, Drew Rouhana would be paralyzed for the rest of his earthly life.

We are to make decisions for ourselves and encourage others to make decisions which are life changing and transforming, the kind which brings joy into the lives of others, not only for the here and now but for eternity.
The word for the church wrapped up in these verses, 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18 tlb, “Always be joyful. Always keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.”

I encourage you in your congregations to go now and do what God wants us to do. Live lives of joy in Jesus.