



WEEKLY STUDY November 19-25, 2023

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

JoyFull: A Generous and Abundant Life

Our sermon series for November is: JoyFull: A Generous and Abundant Life. How would you describe yourself? Your family? Your community. Would you use words like joyful? Generous? Grateful? Full of life? These are attributes we aspire to and want others to see in us. So how do we live in these ways? This November as we enter into another beautiful season of intentional gratitude we will be talking about how to live filled with joy in a hard world; how to live out of abundance rather than scarcity mindset; how to hold fast to hope believe that he who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion.

Our scripture this week is: Philippians 1:3-6

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 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.

- 1) This is our third week with the theme "JoyFull: A Generous & Abundant Life. I am often amazed at the difference between silently reading scripture to myself and hearing it read on Sunday mornings. One of the beautiful things about the letters in the New Testament is the conversational tone in so many of them. In hearing the scripture this Sunday I had the feeling I could have been sitting around with the gathered community in Philippi listening to this letter being read aloud. And I marveled at how this letter, written at that time, could still sound so relevant today. Every phrase has meaning and depth. I could imagine being excited to hear these words, comforted by them, reminded of the strength of community and the importance of working together for the sake of God's kingdom on earth. These words, "partnership in the Gospel" caught my attention. I often relegate Gospel to simply the written Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke & John. This pushed me to consider my part in spreading the Good News – through actions, through words, through monetary gifts.

Question: Read aloud Philippians 1:3-6. What words or phrases catch your attention. How do you interpret what you have heard? In what ways does this bring the words of the letter to life for you?

- 2) This Sunday Rev. Jed gave the Message for Children. He talked about the promises of God and emphasized how important God considers promises to us, using the example of “pinky promises.” (I’m sure every one knows this, but it’s where to people link pinky fingers and say, “I promise.” to one another.) He said there are two promises to remember from God: 1) God will always be there for us. 2) God will always love us.

Question: Are there times when you find it difficult to remember the promises God has made to all people? What do you do when you are struggling to remember? How are you helped by a faith community reminding you of these promises?

- 3) In the sermon this Sunday, Pastor Sam helped us explore the importance of partnership as a faith community. She told us the Greek word “koinonia” is what we translate to the English word “partnership.” Its meanings include: “fellowship, joint participation, the share one has in something, a gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution.” By going back to the language in which a particular scripture was first written, we often receive a much deeper meaning than with the English word we use. For those of us who were growing up in the 60’s and 70’s, Koinonia was used a lot to signify the depth of Christian fellowship and work together. Pastor Sam linked this to 1 Corinthians 12:4-10 where we have the various gifts and services people may possess within the Christian fellowship. Using the image of the body and it’s parts, we see the importance of individuals linked in faith and in the desire to spread the good news. It’s not solo work – but work together that allows us to have the greatest impact.

Question: Think of some of the people you know in our fellowship of faith. What gifts do you see them possessing that adds to our ability to be a source of God’s love? What gifts do you see in yourself that – linked to others – increases the ability of our faith community to make a difference not just within the walls of the church but into our community?

- 4) Pastor Sam talked about the many ways of partnering at Belle Meade UMC that has enabled our ministries within our faith community and into our neighborhood and beyond. If you weren’t present for Sunday’s sermon, I would encourage you to listen to the sermon and, with grateful hearts, rejoice in the ministries of 2023. She said, “As we look to 2024, I am confident that God who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion. God will carry it on. We get to be a part of it.”

Question: How do you intend to be part of sharing God’s love joyfully in 2024?

Prayer: (This week’s prayer is a part of a much longer prayer – ‘A Thanksgiving Prayer’, pgs 199-200, in Grateful. The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks by Diana Butler Bass, HarperOne (2018)

“God, there are days we do not feel grateful. When we are anxious or angry. When we are alone. When we do not understand what is happening in the world, or with our neighbors. We struggle to feel grateful.

But this Thanksgiving, we choose gratitude.

And we will make thanks, with strong hands and courageous hearts. When we see your sacred generosity, we become aware that we live in an infinite circle of gratitude. That we all are guests at a hospitable table around which gifts are passed and received. We will not let anything opposed to love take over this table. Instead, we choose to see grace, free and unmerited love, the giftedness of life everywhere, as the tender web of all creation. In this choosing, and in the making, we will pass gratitude onto the world. Thus, with you, and with all those gathered here, we pledge to make thanks. And we ask you to strengthen us in this resolve. Here, now, and into the future. Around this table. Around the table of our nation. Around the table of the world. Amen”

Weekly Challenges:

In your time of prayer this week, give thanks for Sarah Deweese, Susan Han & Michael Deweese who joined the Belle Meade UMC at the 10:30 worship service. Make thanks – through words and actions each day of this week of Thanksgiving.

(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)