

Surprised By Joy

Philippians 2:17-18

Dominic Tuttle

Good morning! If we haven't met, my name is Dominic Tuttle. I'm the director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries here at St. Paul's Church. Every time I get up here, I have the honor to share God's word with you, and I say that just in case I haven't met someone, or you haven't met me yet. I've been here almost two and a half years now, and I feel like you could get to know me a little bit better, aside from the occasional 15 to 20-minute snippets that you get from me every few months.

So, as a child, my mom cut my hair. The way she puts it, she got tired of getting home from the barber's and getting her kitchen scissors out and fixing my hair. So, she went out and she bought herself some haircutting scissors and a comb and some clippers and just started cutting our hair. Granted, for several years of my childhood, we just shaved my head every summer. I rocked a bowl cut a few times and at one point, my head was completely shaved, except for one patch right here that I grew out really long that we would braid, and I could, like, spin my head like a helicopter. It was experimental times as a child. When I wanted to study for my bachelor's degree in theology, I applied to youth ministry, I had an opportunity to move to England. I lived in a little town called Epsom Surrey, and I lived and worked at a church called The King's Church, where I served as the trainee youth pastor. They knew they weren't getting a fully trained youth pastor, but I had a place to live and learn while I was studying, applying what I was learning. And when I moved to England, I thought, you know what, I have not paid for a single haircut. I am not about to start now. So let me introduce you to Dominic Tuttle, circa 2010.



Yes, that is me in a tree. I wanted a walking stick. I thought they were fun. I would use it for miniature golf with the youth group if we suddenly were like, oh, we don't have anything to do. I was prepared. I would often wear a hat and I got to play Jesus in a lot of Easter plays. No one cared that I had an American accent. I also wasn't shaving because, I mean, I didn't have any equipment. I left my electric razor back in the States because the outlets are different. So, it was a fun, experimental time, and everybody's just relaxed, chill, it's all fine.

But let me tell you, **this** is how my girlfriend, now wife of ten years, met me.



Look at that! To be fair, I asked my friend who was with me to take the picture because I had never seen an ice cream cone like that. It had the double barrel kind of thing, and so I had to hold his ice cream cone so he could take a picture of the ice cream cone. I promise, I only ate one. This is how I met my girlfriend, the same girlfriend who fell in love with me for my heart, for my mind, for my deep thinking. The same girlfriend who, before she had met me, had dated an Olympic swimmer. You can tell she's not shallow. Oh, no. She saw through the hair. And every now and again, she never wanted to force me to cut the hair, it was always a very gentle, loving "Have you thought about cutting your hair?" And there was one point when I was like, you know, it's getting long, it's hot in the summer. Yeah, I'll cut my hair. Okay, progress. Then she said, "Have you ever considered, now that the hair is shorter, that you might look better clean shaven?" Yeah, sure. Why not? I'll try that. She brought me to meet her parents when I looked like that. I tried to pull my hair back and her parents were like, oh, he seems nice. After I cut my hair and I shaved and I cleaned up a little bit, my now mother-in-law grabs Hannah and says, oh, he cleans up quite nicely! He's actually kind of handsome under all of that hair! So, I share all of this with you to help you get to know me a little bit better. But for another purpose, too. And I hope you all enjoyed that. Hang onto that mental image.

We are in this series called Surprised by Joy, and we're walking through the Book of Philippians. Now you can ask any of the teenagers, any time there's a book of the Bible, I usually follow it up with "I love this book!" I love this book of the Bible! I love this, each for a different reason. I love Philippians. Oh, there is so much dynamic life and theology going on there. Yeah, gemstone after gemstone out of the book of Philippians. Highly recommend you read it. It's only like what, four Chapters. It's easy, no problem. You could breeze through it in a day, no problem and then go back and read it again a couple of times. Trust me. So, last week we had the bishop come here and share, talking with us about obedience and the joy that it brings God through obedience. And let me tell you, as a parent, I find great joy when my children are obedient. Looking at all the kids in here brings a different way to look for joy, a different way to find it. So, Philippians Chapter 2: 17-18. "But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you so you too should be glad and rejoice with me." Okay, there's a whole lot that we don't understand right here, immediately on the surface, unless you've done a lot of studying with this book, in which case - high five! Do you want to come up and help me? No? Okay, that's fine. I just want to make sure.... there's room. The key thing that we've got here is this drink offering. The key thing for the series is the end of the first verse and then the second verse. But we're going to take a moment to look at this because we're going to build on it. "Even if I'm being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith." What's a drink offering? I mean, like, share your drink? Like, hey, can I have some of that coffee? Like, okay, that's kind of weird. No.

Paul, as he's writing this letter, is reaching back into the Old Testament. If there were any Jews in the city of Philippi who knew the history, they would have instantly understood what he meant. If you go all the way back to Genesis, there's a guy named Jacob. Now, Jacob has had his ups and downs in life. You know, he steals his brother's birthright, runs away, works seven years to marry a cousin and then his uncle gives him the wrong cousin. So, he works another seven years to marry the cousin he wanted to marry originally. His life is a soap opera! I kind of feel bad for him in some ways. Other times, I think, he made his own bed, he can sleep in it. But he has this moment where God meets him and gives him a new name. He says, you've been called Jacob - now I call you Israel. Which means "to strive with God" because whew, boy, does the nation of Israel wrestle with God through their entire existence and all through the Old Testament. So, here's Jacob, and in his culture, if you wanted to worship a god (little g), you sacrifice something. I'm going to sacrifice this loaf of bread I just made, and I will light it on fire as a sacrifice it to the gods! Is the weather good? Is it raining? We need more rain. All right. Let's sacrifice something bigger until it rains! They really were just trying, trial and error, the whole 'pleasing the gods' problem. But here's a God that introduces himself to Jacob's grandfather and then to Jacob's father. So now it's the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And that's how God became known, to begin with, for the nation of Israel. And so, Jacob, the way his culture does, he sacrifices an offering, and he pours out a drink offering with it to say, God, this is what I have - you can have it. I want to honor you. This is a drink offering. An offering is giving up something of value to show that you are not dependent on it. That's why we have an opportunity for us to give tithes and offerings. This is a way for us to demonstrate that we are not dependent on money. Back then, you didn't necessarily have money. You might have sheep, you might have cows, you might have goats, you might have fields of various crops and that was your wealth. And so, you would give some of it to God. The first 10%, that's a tithe. And then any offering was you saying, you know what, this is weighing too heavy on my mind, I have to let it go. So, Jacob started with a drink offering. You roll forward into Exodus and God says, okay, you're familiar with this concept of a drink offering, this is culturally relevant to you, let's keep that going. I need you to understand that you depend on me first, so I'm going to ask you for a drink offering with these other offerings throughout numbers. There are the different descriptions of this. Much for this, much of this one. There's no trial and error. So, Paul reaches all the way back to these anchor points and says, "Even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith." Does that sound like fun, being poured out as a drink offering? I love that it's communion Sunday today, because Jesus himself reached back to the beginning and instead of saying a blood offering poured out, he said, this is a drink offering - but it's my blood. And in doing so, he also reaches back to the Passover, and he says, I am the true lamb. So, it's this dynamic conversation. And this is why I love Philippians, why I love the Bible, this dynamic conversation with ancient history and tradition being brought forward into their time frame and made true and relevant and vital and something that we can pull from and continue to draw on thousands of years later. A drink offering. Paul is laying himself out saying, even if I die, even if it costs me my life, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. This is a Christ-like sacrifice. Even if I die, even if it costs me my life. Paul is writing these letters from jail. That's why in the whole series Surprised by Joy - he's in chains! And he says, even if I die here, I am glad and I rejoice with all of you, so you too should be glad and rejoice with me. So, we've got a framework here. We've got a framework of this perspective of joy in the wrong place, according to the world.

So, let's take a moment to do a bit of an exercise. This is always dangerous on a Sunday morning, especially when you're sitting down in comfy chairs. I'm going to ask you to close your eyes (and not fall asleep!) If you're at home and you're on the sofa, trust me, I know the temptation. So, close your eyes for a moment. Just take a moment, take a deep breath, and imagine God asks you, "Child, what is the one thing that would bring you the most joy?" Imagine that! God asks you, individually, my child, what is the one thing that would bring you the most joy? Okay, you can open your eyes. Don't fall asleep. In youth group if I have

to, I clap really loud. I can even whistle really loud. I also throw candy at the teenagers, but I have not gotten permission to do that in here - yet. So maybe someday. If God asks you what is the one thing that would bring you the most joy, we all can come up with something. But we're going to take a moment and see how the world would answer this question. For a lot of people in the world and honestly, for some of us, sometimes it's a person. It might be a family member that we've lost contact with, and it would bring so much joy to bring contact back. You focus everything on that person, on winning them back. It could be a relationship. Oh, if only that person would pay attention to me. If only I could go on a date with them. If I could marry that person. I don't know about you; I've had those conversations with God in the past. There's a problem. People are not God. Big surprise. Spoiler alert! People are not God and consequently, we're going to let each other down. We're not perfect. Once again, big surprise. But it's good to remember that from time to time. We do let each other down. And people have been discussing this for a really, really long time. Let's go all the way back to Psalm 118, verse eight. "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in people." Don't get me wrong, I want you guys to trust me, and I want to trust you. That's community building, a community of equitable trust and affection. We're family here. We don't always agree and that's okay. We've got each other's back, we're family, we support each other. There's some trust in that. But if your trust, if your hope for joy is purely in one person or even a group of people - they're going to let you down. It's inevitable. It's better to take refuge in the Lord. You cannot find joy in others.

At the beginning I showed you a delightful picture of me from 12 years ago. That was fun. Makes me laugh, even looking at it now. But that's not finding joy in me. It's a moment of enjoyment. I am not your source of joy. I can't do it; I will let you down. The pastors cannot bring you joy. Your spouse or loved ones cannot be your only source of joy. You can't find it in them. So, what is Paul talking about? Because he's talking about joy. Let's enjoy. Let's rejoice. Let's be glad. What's the other thing that the world, and to be honest, that we put our hope in to find joy? It's stuff. Or, usually, you can boil it down to money. You want a big house. You want that perfect house? That's going to come down to money. You want that car? It's going to come down to money. Maybe it's the job so you can get that money. If only I had that one thing that would bring me joy. The problem with that is it doesn't. It doesn't. Matthew Chapter 6:24 "You cannot serve both God and money." Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is saying, guys, you can't love both because one will come in front of the other. You can love God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all of your strength. That's all. Once again, reaching back to Old Testament, the moment money becomes more important, you are not loving God with all of your heart, mind, soul, strength. You can't serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and man if your goal of finding joy in something. Which these days, roots down to money. You've got to have money to get the thing. If that's your hope, you're going to be disappointed because it's never enough. In fact, Paul continues this conversation, this thought in his letter to Timothy. "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." If money is your goal, your target, it's going to be the root of all kinds of evil. You're going to start treating people like less because money is more important. You're going to spend less time with your family because money is more important. You're going to focus on your things, your stuff. And in doing so, you neglect your relationships, you neglect community. The love of money. Money itself isn't evil - it's the love OF money. And when you love it, you can't serve God. So, we're not going to find our joy in others. We cannot find our joy in selfishness, or in stuff. Eventually it will run out. It gets stale.

So, let's jump back to Philippians now and revisit what Paul is thinking here. Even if I'm being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice. That's giving, giving up, that's not selfishness, that's letting go. You're no longer holding on to everything you want, everything that you think you need. It's letting go. It's sacrifice that's leading us in the right direction. When we allow ourselves to give up our time, our money for other

people, something happens. We are glad and rejoice with everyone and with each other. You see, Paul's in prison suffering. He has no freedom, but he's glad and he will rejoice with all of us. His joy isn't in the people he's writing to. He's not saying, guys, I really wish you would write me a nice letter to cheer me up because I'm really going through a hard time right now. For Paul, simply, the fact that people are out there serving and loving God is bringing him joy.

We're now bridging on to something called substitutional joy. I am glad and I rejoice with all of you. See, Paul is taking a step into another one of my favorite books of the Bible, the Book of James. I quote it all the time in youth Group. James 1:2 "Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy." I mean, that sounds like a party right there! Anyone? No? Let me tell you, as a kid, I hated getting in trouble. If I could avoid it, I would, 100%. It's better to ask permission than forgiveness. My brother, who's two years younger than me, was the exact opposite. We often did not see eye to eye. I don't like getting in trouble. Sometimes you can't avoid it. My brothers and sisters, count it all, joy. Stub your toe. Count it all, joy. Praise the Lord. Where are my keys? I can't find my keys. Count it all, joy. I lost my keys. Trouble happens. Right? Those are small comedic ways and it's hard to just say, oh, yes, I'll count it all, joy. Paul is in prison yet it's an opportunity for joy. Why? Because he has hope for the future. And it's not in himself or anyone else, it's in Jesus. God does not waste anything. If you have been hurt, if you have been treated poorly, wrongly, God will not waste that. If something bad happens in your life, something hard, something difficult, something troubling and everything in you just wants to scream out, God, get me out of here! He will not waste it. Like Psalm 23, our Shepherd, He walks us through that valley of darkness. He doesn't leave us there and when we're out the other side, we are now equipped to help others going through that difficult time. God does not waste any hurt. And so, we consider it an opportunity for joy because down the road, God is going to make this worthwhile. We know that when our faith is tested, our endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. But you can't just skip out on the jail cell. You've got to stay in there and consider that an option for joy. Consider it an opportunity for joy, for great joy. We cannot find our joy in others. We cannot find our joy in ourselves or the stuff we have, but we can find joy in the struggles, and that is completely backwards and upside down to the rest of the world. Are you a masochist? Finding joy in difficulty? No, not exactly. We're finding joy because we have hope that there's more than just this. And we grow, and we learn. We can find joy in our struggles. And here is where we all come together and make this work. We've mixed all the ingredients stirred around, now we're going to turn on the fire underneath it and get this cooking.

We're going to jump to 1 Corinthians Chapter 12. This is right before Paul gets into the famous 'what is love?' Don't say it. That song. Every time I say that someone starts singing. I just had to stop it. Whoa! That was close. So, love is patient, love is kind. One of the most quoted passages, especially at weddings, because it's good to review what love is. So, Chapter 12, Paul is describing the body of Christ. One body, many parts. This makes for harmony among the members so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it. And if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. This is where the rubber meets the road. It's not just finding joy in our difficulties; we share in each other's joy. See, that's what is going on here. We can't find our joy in others. We cannot find our joy in ourselves or what we have. We can find joy in our struggles because we have hope. And then we can share in each other's struggles and joy. That is substitutional joy. If you've got nothing going on in your life to celebrate and you know someone who does, you can celebrate with them, share in that joy. That's one of the best reasons for church members to get together and just say, hey, what good thing has God been doing in your life today, this week? Because for some of us, we need to share in that joy because we're going through the trouble. We're not to the joy part yet. I'm happy to show you goofy pictures of myself, and I have a bunch, if that will

bring a smile to your face, I'll share that with you. I'm not your ultimate source of joy. We have to share that with one another. When you're facing the difficult times, something good can come from it. And maybe that's not enough to completely lift your spirits, but it gives you something to hold on to. It's like a song to sing when you're stuck in the mud. Grab on to that. Let me encourage you this week, if you have something to celebrate, find people to celebrate with you. And don't come in with a look at me and how awesome my life is. Just. Hey, I got to share this with someone. I'm so excited about this. We do this all the time. Anyone support a sports team of any sort? College football, maybe professional sports, anything like that? Sure, a lot of us do. I mean, how do we feel when our team wins? Right. Some of us even jump up and cheer. Did you do anything to earn that win? Most of us were sitting on a sofa. We might have jumped up and said, yeah, but we didn't do anything to make that happen. We're sharing in a joy. We do this all the time. If you're a parent or a grandparent or an uncle or an aunt and you've got kids, grandkids, nieces, nephews who do well on a project and get an A-plus on it, we can celebrate in that. We're excited for them. We share in that joy, even though we didn't have any part in doing that. We can find joy and we do it all the time in community. And that is what Paul is talking about here - substitution of joy. Don't find your joy in others. Don't find it in your own stuff for yourself. Find your joy in your circumstances and share with those around you. And in doing so, we all pull each other up and along.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so, so much for this incredible opportunity that we have to share in your joy and to participate with one another in life. I pray that this week you would open our eyes and our hearts to all the little opportunities for joy around us and give us opportunities to share that with one another. We thank you and we praise you in your name. Amen.