

Aug 20 -God's Family Has No Boundaries
Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:10-11

SLIDE 1

"The Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot." St.
Augustine of Hippo, 1300 years ago

SLIDE 2

Today we are celebrating! We are having a party! What are we
celebrating? Let's start with God's love.

SLIDE 3

A year ago my daughter got married. Damaris and Lawrence live in Claremont CA, on the east side of the Los Angeles area. Their wedding was at a "resort" on the south side of the Arbutus lakes, south of Traverse City. Damaris knew what she wanted: the family would gather, we would eat together and enjoy being together for the first time in several years. Damaris even knew exactly what flowers she wanted: the mayflower for daughter Eden who was born in Massachusetts, goldenrod for son Asher who was born in Nebraska, a rose for Lawrence who grew up in New York City and a sunflower for herself; she was born in Kansas. My daughter is a "big picture" thinker: she comes up with the big picture but she doesn't always grasp all of the details that must be done to accomplish the "plan." I was in Traverse City so I began working on the details: breakfast for Friday, a late lunch that day, where to find the four specific flowers she wanted plus a few additional flowers. Bedding and towels for those who traveled too far to bring their own and many more details. Artwork to decorate the deck on which the ceremony would take place. We offered lodging to Ilva, coming from Sweden, when she arrived a day before we could stay at the resort. Damaris did what she could from 2300 miles but much could be done only here. After the wedding, my son Josh told Damaris "start counting the days until Mother's Day for she owed me big" for all that had to be done right here.

I offer this account, not to say "look at me;" I was doing what any loving parent would do for their child. And then I realized, "Wow, if I'm willing to do this much for someone I love, how much more does God take care of me. We long to be loved; God longs to love us and be accepted into our lives. We long to have **1**

someone who knows us and loves us anyway. God is that someone. We are held close in God's arms as babies are cradled in their parents' arms.

SLIDE 4,5

God's love offers us freedom to enjoy life in God's care. I think there's a Bible verse that says that: Matthew 7:9-11
"If you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

We have reason to celebrate

SLIDE 6,7

- God loves and cares for us
- God calls us friends

About a month ago, as we began talking about spiritual practices, I asked, "Who's your best friend?" The answer could be: God—Father, Son, Spirit. Jesus welcomed us as friends. "I have called you my friends..." John 15:15 God loves us; God calls us friends

SLIDE 8 Yesterday I saw this picture of birds flying out of an open cage. Immediately I thought of today's message: God frees us. We have that promise in John 8:36 "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

We have reason to celebrate

SLIDE 9

- God loves and cares for us
- God calls us friends
- God frees us

SLIDE 10

From what does God's love free us? Richard Foster, in the relatively recent return to ancient spiritual practices writes: "Every spiritual practice should be characterized by carefree gaiety and a sense of thanksgiving. Freedom from anxiety and care forms the basis for celebration. Because we know (God) cares for us, we can cast all our care upon him."

God frees us from self—always having to prove how important we are, how valuable.

God frees us to focus on God first

"Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore, take no thought of tomorrow..."
Matthew 6:33-34

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SLIDE 11 We are to focus on things of God, not things of this world: “Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Philippians 4:8

We have reason to celebrate:

- God loves and cares for us
- God calls us friends
- God frees us from anxiety and care
- God transforms us
 - *to be joyful

SLIDE 12

We can live joyfully

- Psalmist in Psalm 30:11 “God has turned our mourning into dancing.”
God can transform our anxiety, worry into joy
- Psalmist in Psalm 126: 2a, 3 “Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy;...The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.” Each Sunday we take time in our worship service to share how we have seen God at work in the past week. We praise God for the great things he has done.

SLIDE 13

When we live joyfully, we give ourselves permission to play.

Playing improves our creativity and our problem solving ability.

This summer FBC folks, as a group, have attended four Beach Bums games. Twice I have “threatened” to challenge us to be better prepared for the joyful activities at the games

“Dance contest” – perhaps we need to practice our dancing so one of us can win the prize offered each time there is a “dance contest.”

SLIDE 14

And then just last Wednesday, at FBC’s final Beach Bums outing, I turned to Tana and said perhaps we need to practice the actions to “Y-M-C-A” This song was written and recorded in the late 1970s. In it, a young man, down on his luck, is invited to go to the Y-M-C-A. Remember, the YMCA started as a Christian organization to meet both the spiritual and

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physical needs of young men in London in 1844. At the end of the 8th inning, we are invited to stand, do the actions and possibly sing “Y-M-C-A” We haven’t had many participants among the FBC folks. It may have something to do with the actions....(demonstrate Y, M, C, A)

We can live joyfully, even giving ourselves permission to play!

We have reason to celebrate

- God loves and cares for us
- God calls us friends
- God frees us from anxiety and care
- God transforms us
 - *to be joyful
 - *to love those not like us

SLIDE 15

We are free to love others as Christ has loved us. **SLIDE 16**
Psalm 133:1 “How good and how pleasant it is that kindred dwell together”

Like fine oil on the head flowing down to the beard of Aaron
Oil – used in consecration of the priest, a joyous occasion, the highest idea of pleasantness

Indicative of any time of joy, festivity; fragrant, abundant
Psalm 67 – May God be gracious to us, bless us, show us favor

****that Your way be known on earth, Your deliverance among all nations**

We are transformed to put God first so we can share God’s love with those of all nations

SLIDE 17

Yes, there are challenges to celebration in unity and harmony

- Replicas of Nina and Pinta docking in Traverse City this weekend – In comments posted following the news article of their arrival, there were such harsh, mean, almost hateful words used toward the few Native Americans who were present to protest a time in our history that ushered in harsh treatment of those already living on this continent
- Charlottesville – a group of 100 clergy walked peacefully toward the area of the scheduled protest. A young man, wearing the blue shirt associated with the KKK members

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present, walked past. As the clergy approached the gathering area, the young man yelled at them “Heretics” My question for all of us, do we know who are our brothers and sisters in Christ and who is our adversary? We need to be sure we study, pray, seek the guidance of God’s Spirit to if we are to love those not like us.

--August - the month we remember Hiroshima, a few days later Nagasaki. Two atomic bombs dropped on Japanese cities in an effort to end World War II in the Pacific

There are Christians in Japan; there have been Christians in Japan for over 100 years.

Years ago I worked with a program to bring Japanese high school girls to the US for three weeks at Christmas; a program to help these girls experience a Christian Christmas. Shokei Girls School, the school they attended, was founded by an American Baptist missionary. Today it is operated by the Japanese Baptist Union. In my efforts to find homes for the girls and the teachers who came with them, I asked a retired couple in Parsons KS to host the male teachers for a few days. At first Jim said “no;” he had served in the Pacific during WWII and had a great dislike for Japanese. Reluctantly the couple finally agreed to host the male Japanese teacher. By the end of the students’ brief stay, Jim, this former US soldier, expressed appreciation for getting to know someone from Japan

God’s love transforms us to love even those who are not like us.

God’s family has no boundaries—even citizens of nations once enemies can love one another as children of God.

We have reason to celebrate today!

SLIDE 18

God loves and cares for us

God calls us friends

God frees us

God transforms us

To be joyful

To love even those who are not like us

Let’s celebrate!!

SLIDE 19

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