

A Sermon by the Rev. Jeffrey A. Packard	Prepared for the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church, Spotsylvania
To be delivered on April 20, 2014	On the occasion of Easter Day

Obligation to Joy

“On this day the Lord has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

This day is a joyous day! This day is a day for rejoicing! This is the day on which God has acted. This is the day that God raised Jesus from the dead. Let us rejoice and be glad, today, and every day.

Even as we read the account of Mary, Peter, and the beloved disciple who saw the empty tomb and were confused and frightened, **w**e know what that empty tomb meant. We know that it meant Jesus was alive. Death could not contain him. God’s power and God’s grace is too great. And we are the inheritors of that grace. We are raised to new life along with Jesus. We are promised eternal life. So we rejoice! Can I get an ‘Alleluia’? Alleluia!

Today we rejoice. Today we feast. Today we celebrate. Today we sing all the joyful songs. Today is the day of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. So what about tomorrow? How do we keep the joy of today alive tomorrow, and every day? Is it possible to do that? Can we be joyful every day? Well, I would say that not only is it possible to be joyful every day, but that we have an obligation to do so.

Jesus’ resurrection changed the world. As followers of Christ, we have an obligation to live in that new world. Joy is simply one of the characteristics of the new world that Jesus’ resurrection ushers in. Now, don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying that you need to walk around with some vacant look in your eyes, an affected smile plastered on your face. You’ve seen these people. They seem to be so excited about everything. “Good morning! How are you this fine morning? Isn’t this a great day? We’re going to have a great time!” These people make great

camp counselors, but they're very annoying. No, that's not what I'm talking about. Don't confuse happiness with joy.

Sometimes we're happy. Sometimes we're not. Sometimes we're in a great mood. Sometimes we're in a really bad mood. These are emotions; and our emotions are involuntary. We don't have any control over them. Our emotions are simply the way we react to what's going on around us. If you wake up in the morning, and you break your shoelace while tying your shoes, then you burn your toast at breakfast, miss the bus, and when you finally get to school your girlfriend breaks up with you, then when you get to chemistry class you find out there's a pop quiz, and you end up feeling really bad, angry, irritable. That doesn't mean you're a bad Christian. It just means you're paying attention, cause that was a really bad day. It makes sense to feel bad after a day like that. But that's not what I'm talking about when I'm talking about being joyful every day.

Joy, at least the way I'm using it, isn't really an emotion. It's kind of more like a choice. We choose to be joyful, because of the Good News of God in Christ. We choose to be joyful, because we have chosen to live in this new world to which we have access through Christ. We have a choice. We can choose differently. We can choose to focus on the negative. We can choose to focus on the death, and ignore the reality of resurrection. We can choose to focus on defeat, and ignore the victory that has already been won for us. We can choose to focus on the pain and sorrow and injustice of life, and abandon hope. You've been around people like this, people who have chosen to be joy-less. You can tell, because when you're around someone like this you start to feel your own joy draining out of you. It affects you, doesn't it? A joy-less person can really suck the life out of you.

On the other hand, being around someone who has real joy, deep joy, a joy based on true faith, can be... well, a joy. It picks you up to be around a joyful person. That joy can rub off on you, just as sure as the joy-less person can take it out of you.

Like I said, a joyful person isn't happy all the time. A joyful person can feel pain. She can feel sad. He can feel lonely, or depressed, or even mournful. But when a joyful person mourns, he mourns with a sense of abiding hope, not denying the reality of death or loss, in fact feeling it quite deeply, but mourning with the knowledge that there is more than just the end of life as we experience it, more than just the painful separation from those we love. The joyful person mourns with hope, cries with confidence, experiences pain with faith that there is something real beyond that pain. We cannot simply choose to be happy. I wish we could. But we can choose to hold on to joy, and joy can get us through many dark valleys.

Joy, true joy, lives deep within us. It affects every aspect of our lives. It is like the lens through which we view everything. Joy can transform us. It can become one of the major themes in the narrative of our life. It is not fickle like our emotions or our moods. It cannot be taken away from us, but it can be lost, if we don't hold onto it. Joy must be nurtured, fed by a constant diet of prayer and praise. It must be treasured and adored. Most importantly, if we want more of it, if we want an abundance of joy, a growing supply, then we must give it away. Because like love, joy can only grow when we share it.

“On this day the Lord has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

Let that be our daily motto. Let our faith and our hope in Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead, be the foundation for our joy. Let our proclamation be today, and every day,

Alleluia. Christ is risen.
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.