



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

March 11, 2018

Pastor Roy Rose

4th Sunday in Lent

First Lesson: [Numbers 21:4-9](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 38](#)

Second Lesson: [Ephesians 2:4-10](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 3:14-21](#)

Sermon Text: [Hebrews 12:1-2](#)

THE JOY OF LENT

The Joy of Christ's victorious suffering

The Joy of following Him to victory

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

May the grace of God which brings salvation be with you all. Amen.

[Hebrews 12:1-2](#) - Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Oh Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us and grant us your peace. Amen.

Friends in Christ:

If you had a chance to look at your worship folder before church, were you surprised to see that the theme of this sermon is **The Joy of Lent**? How could there be joy at this solemn season of Lent – the Passion Season – the season of remembering Jesus' extreme suffering and death for our sins? The season in which we sing hymn verses like:

“O dearest Jesus, what law have you broken That such sharp sentence should on you be spoken?” (CW 117:1)

“’Tis I who should be smitten, My doom should here be written: Bound hand and foot in hell.” (CW 113:3)

“Stricken, smitten, and afflicted, See him dying on the tree! ‘Tis the Christ, by man rejected; Yes, my soul, ‘tis he, ‘tis he. (CW 127:1)

None of that sounds very joyful, does it?

Joy? In a season of repentance? A season that is supposed to focus our attention on the sorrow we feel over our sins against God? A season in which our churches may take on a somewhat more somber appearance with deep purple or black Paraments? A season in which some think for six weeks people should give up something they usually enjoy? Something they maybe don’t want to give up at all? Where’s the joy in Lent?

Or isn’t this season a lot more work for people who are involved in the extra special services: the pastors, teachers, secretaries, musicians, ushers, choir directors, and so on? And then the hassle of taking extra time for busy Christians to come to these extra worship services? Is there really **Joy In Lent**?

The answer this text from Hebrews gives is a resounding: YES! There is great joy be found in taking extra time to worship together and to fix our eyes on Jesus! Joy in gathering to learn or review once again the wondrous details of how eternal salvation was won for us! As we’ll see from these verses, it was our Savior’s great joy to take our place on the cross and secure our place in heaven; and that’s what makes for our great joy in following Him: **The Joy of Lent!**

These verses urge us to fix our eyes on Jesus. Like those Israelites bitten by poisonous snakes who fixed their eyes on that brass/bronze serpent on a pole, so we’re told to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame. As our only Savior, Jesus is the author, the pioneer, the foundation of our faith. He is also the perfecter, or finisher, of our faith who is going to bring us through the valley of the shadow of death into our eternal home with him in heaven. Peter writes that we will receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls ([1 Peter 1](#)).

Jesus could face the suffering and his death on the cross with the joy of knowing that he was winning salvation for us. He knew He was going to crush Satan’s head in victory... that He would redeem us from the curse of our sins... rescue us from the power of death... and deliver us from everlasting imprisonment in hell! The joy set before Him is the joy of knowing His holy, precious blood would cleanse us from every spot and stain of our sin so we could enter the holiness of heaven, and be with Him forever!

No wonder the Bible says that Jesus set His face like flint ([Isaiah 50:7](#)) in His determination to go up to Jerusalem ([Mark 10:33](#)) to endure the cross, scorning its shame. **The Joy of Lent** for Jesus was that He could see the victory He would win and all the glories that would follow for us ([1 Peter 1:11](#)).

It's the same joy that Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, the Wise Men, Simeon and Anna, and many others felt at Jesus' birth; the birth of Him who was going to rescue them and all of us from eternal suffering and death. This is the real **Joy of Lent** for you and me still today. It's the joy Jesus wanted to share with all of us! Listen to His prayer for His disciples of all time as he prayed in the Upper Room the night before His crucifixion: *Father, these things I spoke in the world that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.* ([John 17:13](#).) That same night He promised those who were with Him in the Upper Room: *Your sorrow will be turned into joy. No one will take away your joy!* ([John 16:20-23](#).)

Now that we've been brought to faith, we share in that same joy. We have joy and peace in believing, the Bible says ([Romans 15:13](#)). Joy in believing our sins are forgiven and that now we are at peace with God! So that now we can have the joy of following Him! Even when we must follow Him in suffering, as His disciples today, we still fix our eyes on Jesus, who comforts us by promising: *Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject (you)... because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.* ([Luke 6:22-23](#).)

In a world which strongly, even violently, opposes God's will, a world like ours today which wants to hear what is "politically correct" but also wants to do just the opposite of God's Word, in a world which often loves to do wrong and vehemently opposes Christians who insist on doing what is right in God's eyes, in such a world, God comforts us through Peter, saying: *Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed* ([1 Peter 4:13](#)).

None of us will ever suffer as much as Jesus suffered to pay for our sins on the cross, but as we follow in His footsteps, enduring suffering for His sake, we can adopt the attitude which Paul the Apostle had when he wrote, *we are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulations* ([2 Corinthians 6:10; 7:4](#)).

This book of Hebrews shows us how the Old Testament and the New Testament fit together as Jesus came and fulfilled all the prophecies about him, especially of him being our High Priest to offer up the greatest sacrifice of all, his own blood, to pay for all of our sins. In Chapter 11, the writer reminds us of the great heroes and heroines of faith in the Old Testament time who had looked forward to Christ, and even died for Him. And now the writer begins Chapter 12 by encouraging us: *in view of this great*

cloud of witnesses, all these great examples of faith, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Don't runners in track meets and marathons usually wear the lightest clothing possible so that nothing is going to slow them down? In a spiritual sense, we are told here we should do the same: *get rid of anything that would weigh us down or hinder us from running the race of following Christ Jesus!*

Some things might not be sinful in themselves, but it might be that they just take up so much of our time that we begin to think that we don't have any time to read God's Word, the Bible, or to hear God's Word in our church. Then maybe some of those "weights" need to be removed, or at least adjusted, so they don't hold us back in our Christian race, so they don't keep us from fixing our eyes on Jesus!

Or, are there some things which really **are** sins that are entangling us, tripping us up, and which we really need to discard completely so that we can finish the Christian race and remain faithful to Christ Jesus until the end? Someone has suggested a "spiritual diet-plan" that we might use to get rid of that extra spiritual "weight" that is holding us back. This is the plan:

1. Know your spiritual weakness.
2. Avoid those situations where you are most likely be tempted.
3. Plan activities that are pleasing to God.
4. Use God's Word with prayer every day for strengthening.
5. Trust His power to help you run the race of Christian faith and life to its end.

Or we could sum up the whole plan by saying, "Feed your Christian faith and starve your old sinful nature!"

The real **Joy of Lent** (or any season of the year) is to know that we have been saved by God's grace through faith in the sacrifice that Jesus made for all of our sins and in the victory that He won for us. Now we are God's own children and His new creation! Saved and given a rebirth to be like the dedicated long-distance runner who sets aside everything that is going to hinder him/her and keeps on running the race with patience and perseverance, never giving up. Never giving up in faith and devotion to Christ until we've reached our goal of heaven with Him.

That reminds me of a story I once read about Sir Winston Churchill, who did not show much potential when he was in an English Prep School and was in the lower one-third of his class. But eventually he led Great Britain during its darkest hours of WW2. Near the end of his life, it is said that Churchill was invited back to that prep school, where he had been less than an average student, so that he could give a speech. According to this account, that great leader simply got up and simply said: "Young gentlemen, never

give up! Never give up! Never give up! Never! Never! Never! Never!" Then he sat down and left them with a message they could not forget!

Nor should we as Christians ever forget to fix our eyes on Jesus, throw off everything that would hinder our spiritual life, avoid every sin that would entangle and trip us up, and then run with perseverance the race of Christian faith and life! Never giving up until, by the grace of Him who is the Author and Perfecter of our faith, we reach the eternal joy of our heavenly home! That's the joy that was set before Him as He endured the cross in our place!

Because of that joy that Jesus won for you and me, we can sing, not just the somber hymn verses in this Lenten season, but also joyful verses like these:

"Believing, we rejoice To see the curse remove; We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice And sing his bleeding love." (CW 128:5)

"Lord, in loving contemplation Fix our hearts and eyes on you Till we taste your full salvation And your unveiled glory view." (CW 111:5)

"And when, dear Lord, before your throne in heaven To me the crown of joy at last is given, Where sweetest hymns your saints forever raise you, I too shall praise you." (CW 117:7)

"Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, Dearest Jesus, unto Thee."
(CW 114:1)

The Joy of Lent is the joy that we can speak about and sing about. It's the joy that we also feel at a Christian funeral where we may be sad at being separated from a brother or sister in faith, but we can rejoice for them that they have entered the joys of their heavenly home. That joy of salvation won for us and guaranteed to us by the precious blood of Christ is the joy which we can have in all situations of life. May such joy be yours in every season of the year. **The Joy of Lent!** Amen.