

Thank you to the Pont Choir for the Cantata this morning. This morning when we light the Third Advent Candle – the Candle of Joy. The antithesis for me of joy is worry.

- So the first fill-in on the SermonNotes Card is Worry. That is where we begin on this Sunday when we consider joy.
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My life changed last week. My daughter called me and said, “Dad, what are you getting Mom for Christmas.” How can such a simple thing turn my life upside down? But it did. All of a sudden worry overwhelmed.

Benjamin Franklin said: “Do not anticipate trouble or worry about what may never happen. Keep in the sunlight.” Right, Ben Franklin. Tell me how to do that, Ben Franklin! I read a biography about you, Ben Franklin, and you did not always walk in the sunshine. You worried. And I worry – most recently when my daughter asked that Christmas present question.

See that third candle on our Advent wreath? It is called the candle of joy. It is there because joy is a significant part of what Jesus was born to bring to us.

Jesus said, “*My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.*” [John 10:10b] That is joy talk. And Paul says in our text for today: “*Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice.*” [Philippians 4:4]

Worried people do not feel a lot of joy. That is the problem.

So, let’s see what Paul has to say that might keep us full of joy. That brings us to the second word on the SermonNote Card.

- The second word on the SermonNotes Card is Pray.

Paul says this: “*Do not worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.*” Imagine with me an older man in a little room: maybe about the size of our stable over there.

BTW, isn't that stable great. Thanks to Tom Weber, who not only helps make sets for Trollwood in the summer, but also made us a Nativity Scene for Christmas this year. That is great!

Imagine an older man in a room about that size, with a Roman guard standing outside the door. He sits in his locked room and writes, "*Do not worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.*" "*Do not worry about anything; pray.*"

What are the things that lock us in, or lock us out? Thousands of things, if we are honest. I don't have the money. I don't have the time. I don't have the resources. I don't have the friends. I don't have the breaks and the luck. I don't have the...

Well, says the Apostle Paul, you have to pray about these things. These are the things you need to pray about. Prayer changes things.

I told you about the pastor who put up a sign on his office door that said, "Prayer Changes Things." His sign disappeared. The pastor bought another sign and put it up – "Prayer Changes Things." That sign also disappeared.

The pastor bought and put the same sign up a third time on his door. This time he kept a closer eye on his sign and he caught a member taking down the sign. He asked the member in exasperation, "Don't you like prayer?" "Pastor," said the church member, "prayer is fine. I don't like change."

Prayer changes – what? A boy was overheard praying, and saying the word "Tokyo." His father asked him what he was doing. The boy said, "I took a geography test today. I made a mistake. Now I am asking God to make Tokyo the capital of France."

Prayer changes – what? That brings us to our next words.

- The third and fourth words on the SermonNotes Card are: *hearts and minds.*

First and foremost prayer changes our hearts and our minds. It changes us in this way: We come to understand that God is in charge.

There is another important word in our verses for this morning. I invite you to circle the word “guard.” Next to it write this definition: “to keep locked up as a prisoner.”

An old man locked up in a little room, with a Roman guard outside his door, says that his real guard is Jesus Christ. What Jesus guards is his heart and his mind. Jesus keeps our hearts and our minds locked up in grace and peace.

I was reminded of that when I was Christmas shopping last week. I saw a two year old who was – how shall we say it – all over the place!

And watching over that child was a parent. Eyes alert – ears alert – heart alert.

- Focused on guarding that child from all harm and danger.
 - Focused on keeping that child from becoming lost.
 - Keeping that child locked up in peace and safety.
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Look at that Nativity Scene again. You know: Jesus really did come. It is not just a story for the kids. He came. He wants to get out of the shed we put him in. He wants to get into our hearts and minds.

When we keep Jesus in the shed, we really ought to worry – worry endlessly and worry constantly.

But when, by faith, this one moves out of the shed and into our hearts and minds, we bring the things we worry about to him. He keeps captive our hearts and minds.

Let us pray...

