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KIND OF LIKE THAT ZANY DOG

John 15:9-11

One of the hottest stand up comedians right now is a guy named Nick Bargatze. He has a calm, humble delivery that focuses on making fun of himself. He talked about his concern with his weight. He said one fitness expert cautioned him against eating too much fruit because it has high sugar content. He says, “Let’s go to that point, all right? I don’t think I’m where I’m at because I got into some pineapple last night.” He says you can know he’s not real smart because he bought 2 of the same reversible jacket because he wanted to have it in both colors.

His humor hits home because we can relate to him. I think of all the times our attempts at raising our kids seemed futile. One day when Toby, who was 8 or 9 at the time, had a couple of friends over they were playing with Legos in his room. At the end of the day his buddies went home and his room resembled the site of a Lego tornado. There were Lego pieces everywhere. Laurie said, “Toby, we need to clean up this mess.” He said, “You can do it.” She said, “I need some help.” He said, “Well, Jesus is in your heart. Ask him and he’ll help you.”

It's good to laugh about that kind of thing. It’s generally good for us to laugh. Laughter is a wonderful thing, especially when it is a result of joy. Today we’re going to think about joy. Joy is a beautiful thing that we all want. The *Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament* says *chara,* the Greek word for joy, is “the culmination of existence.” Writer Robert Louis Stevenson said, “To miss joy is to miss everything.” Jesus raised the issue of joy in the passage we’re going to look at today, John 15:9-11.

JESUS POSSESSES JOY

The night before Jesus was arrested he was giving final instruction and encouragement to his followers. In the first 8 verses of this chapter he had given an illustration. He said he was the true vine, and his followers were the branches. The message was simple. Like the branches of a grapevine stay attached to the vine, and when they do that they produce fruit, so Jesus’ followers needed to stay attached to him. If they did that they also would produce the fruit of godly lives. The central message of this chapter is they needed to stay true to him, to remain with him in faith.

What Jesus taught and what he was, was a radical departure from what his contemporaries believed and expected. From the beginning of his ministry his teaching contradicted the accepted wisdom of the mainstream leaders of the ancient Jewish people. You can see that in the Sermon on the Mount. That powerful sermon directly attacked the beliefs and practices of the Pharisees, the most popular group in Judea at that time. At the very beginning of that sermon he said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” The Pharisees believed the exact opposite of that. In Matthew 6:5 he said, “Do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others.” In other words, faith shouldn’t be the phony show the hypocrites make it. He was not talking about hypocrites in general. He meant the Pharisees. He was directly attacking them. Jesus criticized their hypocrisy in both their sometimes twisted interpretations of God’s Law that allowed them to claim to be living by it while actually violating it, and their phony religious practices.

That was just the beginning. We can also see that his whole identity and mission as Messiah was totally different than what the Pharisees taught about Messiah. They taught that Messiah would be a great king, a conquering hero that would defeat Israel’s enemies and usher in an era of unprecedented power and abundance for the Jewish people. Jesus taught that he had come to give himself up, to die to save all people, including Israel’s enemies.

The biggest difference had to do with the central factor in gaining God’s favor, which is the most important issue in life. The accepted wisdom of that culture was that one gained God’s favor by being Jewish and by adhering to the Law of Moses. Jesus claimed one gains God’s favor through grace, by believing in Jesus. The Gospel of grace through faith was a revolutionary departure from what most of their culture believed.

The point of all of this was that Jesus had put his disciples in a position where they had to make a choice. It was not going to be possible for them to believe in Jesus, follow him, while also hanging on to the familiar doctrine and practice of the leaders of their people. Jesus warned his followers that the ancient Jewish people were mostly going to reject him, and they were going to do so violently. This passage has one main message. It is that people must choose. Will they believe in Jesus, accept and follow his work and his teaching, or will they stick with the familiar teaching of the religious establishment of that day?

Jesus still is iconoclastic in our culture today. We face a similar decision point. Will we remain with him, believe in him and his teaching and work, or will we buy what our culture preaches? We must make a choice because Jesus and our culture are totally opposed and at odds. To follow and be faithful to Jesus is to reject our culture and choose to go against the tide. James put the challenge succinctly in James 4:4. “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God?” He went on to say if you become a friend of the world you automatically become an enemy of God.

Jesus was saying, “It’s my way or their way. You have to choose one or the other, you can’t have both.” He represented a fork in the road. You had to take one or the other. If you drive north on I-5 through LA, over the Tejon Pass through the mountains, you will come down into the San Joaquin Valley. It won’t be long before the freeway splits. You have to choose which way you are going to go. Some of the lanes continue on as I-5, which can take you all the way to Seattle, but some go north as Highway 99. If you go on 99 you are headed toward Bakersfield, Delano, Visalia, Tulare, Fresno, Merced and other Central Valley metropoli. You can’t do both. You have to pick one. On the freeway of life everyone comes to a place where one lane heads off in one direction with a big sign over it that says, “Jesus’ way,” and several other lanes go in a completely different direction marked by a sign proclaiming, “The World’s Way.” You must take one or the other. That’s what Jesus was telling his followers in these verses. In verse 10 he said, “If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love.” That’s essentially the same thing as the branches remaining in the vine as he described in verse 4.

Verse 11 is a profound verse. There he explains why he was driving home this point and emphasizing the need to make the choice to stick with him. “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” If they, and we, choose to stick with him, believe in him, his joy will be in us. It is obvious that this promise of his joy being in us would not be very appealing if Jesus didn’t have joy. People don’t typically think of Jesus as joyful. But how much would you pay attention if I said to you, “If you will heed my instruction, my great singing voice will be in you’? Having a great singing voice would be a wonderful thing. But having my singing voice, not so much. I don’t have a great singing voice. I have a barely tolerable singing voice, so most people would say, “No thank you.” If Jesus were a sort of dour, serious and joyless person, the poster child for being a sad stick in the mud, no one would be the least bit interested in having his joy in them. Which tells us that contrary to the common depiction of Jesus as the “Man of Sorrows,” he had to have been a truly joyful person.

In his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard, the late philosopher and college professor, wrote that we need to change how we think about God. We need to realize that “God leads a very interesting life, and that he is full of joy. Undoubtedly he is the most joyous being in the universe.” He explained why this is so. He described a moment when a friend of his took him to see some beaches near Port Elizabeth in South Africa. He had seen many beaches before so he wasn’t thinking much of it. But he says when he got his first look at these beaches he stood there in stunned silence. He said the scenery was of such beauty and power that it hardly seemed to be of this world. He said words fail to describe it. The scene filled him with joy. Then he realized that God sees this magnificent scene and billions like it all the time. He wrote, “Great tidal waves of joy must constantly wash through his being.”

Laurie and I were disappointed when our most recent vacation tuned out to be a covid train wreck. There were some things we really wanted to do that we didn’t get to do on that cursed trip. Among them was doing some snorkeling and another was enjoying a sunset over the beach. Had we gone snorkeling we would not have seen anything we haven’t seen many times before. Had we been able to watch a sunset it wouldn’t have been all that different than ones we’d seen before. But those things touch us in a special way. They bring great joy to us that is too deep for words. And God sees all of those things without ceasing, and experiences that great joy without end. That’s just one aspect of God’s joy.

Willard went on to say because the fullness of God lived in Jesus, the fullness of divine joy lived in him as well. Jesus was likely the most joyful person who has ever lived, despite what he faced in this world. There are a few signs of this in the Gospels. In the Sermon on the Mount at one point Jesus was discussing God answering prayer. In Matthew 7:9-10 he said, “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?” Picture that in your mind. A son says, “Dad, I’m hungry, can I have some fish?” And Dad says, “Sure, son,” and hands him a rattlesnake. Jesus was making a joke, one that is pretty funny. Imagine I say to Laurie, “I’m really hungry and I’m craving a taco. Could you give me a taco?” And she hands me a scorpion. That’s a pretty funny image. Jesus was often a funny guy. This is one example. He was funny because he was filled with joy.

Here’s another example. In Matthew 17 Peter brought up the issue of paying the temple tax. There were a number of ways Jesus could have dealt with that issue. He could have suggested they get the money from the apostle’s CFO, Judas. Hey Jesus was a religious leader so he could have done that most religious thing and take an offering. But Jesus came up with a unique plan for paying his taxes that I would like to employ today. In verse 27 he said to Peter, “So that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch, open its mouth and you will find a 4 drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.” Yes, there were a lot of ways Jesus could have come up with the tax money. There aren’t many that would have been weirder or funnier than that. Don’t you think Jesus, Peter, and everybody else found that to be a pretty comical solution to the tax problem? How many times in his life do you figure Peter found a coin in the mouth of a fish he caught? I’m guessing that was once. Why did Jesus do that? At least in part because he liked making people laugh. The point here is that Jesus was a very funny guy. You can see evidences of it throughout the gospels. He may not have been a stand up comic like Jim Gaffigan or Nate Bargatze, but he was one humorous dude. The joy that was in him just came out at times.

All we need to do is think about who liked to be around Jesus and who didn’t. The hated tax collectors, the prostitutes, the bottom rung of society, the people who liked to party, to have a good time, flocked to him. I’m fairly sure those folks didn’t love being around him because he was as funny as a crutch. The acceptable people, the religious leaders, didn’t like him. That’s a pretty good indication that Jesus was a lot of fun to be around.

It is important that we think about what joy actually is. Joy can be a little difficult to define. We know it when we feel it or when we see it. I got a reminder of this a couple of weeks ago when Laurie showed me a video that our daughter, Carissa, sent to us. Hunter, our youngest grandson, has given us a little cause for concern because when the time came for him to crawl, he didn’t crawl. The time came for him to start walking, and he showed no signs of being close to walking. There was a bit of concern that he wasn’t developing as he should. We have all been praying for him and trying to encourage him. We’ve seen that he actually has been developing, but just slowly, and he wasn’t hitting some of those milestones. The past few months he’s shown some encouraging signs. He also has been kind of grumpy the way little kids get when they’re on the verge of a leap forward in their development but are frustrated because they’re not quite there yet. Then a couple of weeks ago Carissa sent us a video. Hunter was standing in their family room, holding on to a chair. His brother, Wesley, was close by, encouraging him. Then, while laughing, Hunter let go of the chair and took his first few steps. He was laughing like crazy and Wesley was cheering loudly. Hunter was joyful, Wesley was rejoicing, Hunter’s parents were cheering and Laurie and I experienced great joy. We watched the few seconds of that video over and over because it brought us so much joy.

That is an aspect of joy that we all understand. But Jesus wasn’t having happy events like that in his life. That night when he said these things was about to be the worst night of his life, and he knew what was coming. Yet in that context, he still had joy. He wasn’t crazy. He had a joy that is deeper and stronger than anything happy circumstances can produce.

What is this form of joy? There was an old *Peanuts* cartoon in which Lucy, the cranky fussbudget, asked Charlie Brown, “Have you ever known anyone who is really happy?” As she is finishing her question Snoopy, the dog, appears, dancing wildly, glee written all over his silly face, clearly unconcerned with how he looks to anyone. Then Lucy said to Charlie Brown, “Have you ever known anyone who was really happy and still in their right mind?” Isn’t that what we really want, to be truly joyful even though we are in our right minds? But what is that like?

The American Psychological Association, attempting to define joy, says it is, “A feeling of extreme gladness, delight or exaltation of spirit arising from a sense of well being or satisfaction.” That begins to give us the picture of what this joy is. It comes from a firm satisfaction with life, a positive sense that life is what it should be and delight in that life, plus gratitude for it.

Jesus was certainly not happy about what was going to happen to him in the coming hours. But he had already said it was for that hour that he had come into the world. He had a mission and he was about to take the final painful steps that would complete that mission. He was satisfied with his life, because he was fulfilling the purpose for his existence. Plus, he had confidence in how it was all going to turn out. This gave him that sense of satisfaction, a joy about life even when it was incredibly hard.

JESUS WANTS US TO HAVE JOY

What does Jesus want to do in our lives? We all know he wants to make us holy. That certainly is true. Peter, one of Jesus’ closest friends and surely his most fervent follower, would later write a letter to believers that we know as 1 Peter. In 1 Peter 1:15-16 he wrote, “Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

But being holy is not always well understood. We all know that no one likes a person that is “holier than thou.” That expression associates holiness with being rigid and judgmental. It smacks of being proud and looking down on other people, and usually has a helping of hypocrisy. So being holy generally is not thought of as a desirable thing in our society. However, that is a wrong understanding of holiness. We need to understand what it means to be holy the way God does.

There is a verbal similarity in English between the word “holy” and the word “whole.” They sound much alike. It turns out, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, if you go back far enough into the roots of the two words there actually is a connection between them. To be whole is to be healthy. It turns out that there is also an element of that idea in the term holy. To be holy is to be healthy, whole. That’s a far cry from the idea of being proud, rigid and judgmental.

One of the main components of holiness in the Bible is the sense of being set apart, being special, marked out for a purpose. So to be holy in the sense Peter used it meant to be a special person, a whole healthy individual set apart for some important purpose.

Now think about what joy is. It is that gladness that comes from satisfaction with life, from that sense of well being. If one is holy, one is healthy, having that well being, if one is set apart for a special purpose one will have that sense of satisfaction with life because one has life worth living. In other words, when we have true biblical holiness, we will have joy, that sense of satisfaction that life is as it should be and all is well.

People sometimes think that if they actually commit themselves to obeying God, life is going to be drudgery. It will remove all the fun out of life and there will be no joy. But Jesus said just the opposite is true. What he wants is that we would have his joy in us. Remember, as Dallas Willard said, he is the most joyful person who has ever lived. His will is that we would have his joy in us. In fact, he said he wants our joy to be complete. The term translated “Complete” meant to perfect fully or to pervade. The verb sometimes meant to fill. So Jesus said he wanted us to be filled with joy. Jesus didn’t just want us to have a little joy. He wanted joy to pervade our lives, for us to be literally perfectly joyful. Who wouldn’t want that? We’d all love for joy to pervade everything we are and do.

Nehemiah tells the story of Nehemiah leading the effort to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, which had been demolished when the Babylonians conquered Judah. He began with rebuilding the wall around the city. He was opposed by people who wanted no part of a rebuilt Jerusalem. Times were difficult and resources were less than abundant. At one point in the project they paused because they had found a copy of the Law. So they had a celebration of sorts and spent half the day listening as the Law was read. The people began weeping. They were devastated not only by the poor condition of their city, but by their own ignorance and disobedience to God’s covenant law. But in Nehemiah 8:10 Nehemiah said to them, “Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” Yes, there was a lot that was difficult and bad, but having the joy of the Lord would give them the strength to do what they needed to do.

The joy of the Father was in Jesus, and that was what sustained him and enabled him to do the difficult things he had to do. If we have the joy of Jesus in us it will give us the strength to live as Jesus wants us to live. The simple truth is joy enables us to work through a lot of hard things. Many years ago when Michael and Carissa moved to Mississippi when he was assigned to be a flight instructor there by the Marines, Laurie and I had an arduous trip to visit them there for the first time. They had asked us to take care of Carissa’s rabbit, Lily Belle. We did that for a couple of months. Then we had the chance to fly back to visit them and they asked if we could bring Lily Belle with us. We flew on Christmas Day, 2013. We thought flying on Christmas Day would be mellow because no one wants to travel on Christmas Day. We thought wrong. It was very busy. We did not have TSA Pre-check, so we had to go through the ordeal of the worst of TSA. Only in addition we had a bunny in a pet carrier to navigate through the process. This seemed to be a novel thing because they were a little unsure what to do about it. They seemed concerned that we were trying to sneak a bunny bomb on the plane. At one point they took Laurie into a private room along with Lily to check her over. She had to take Lily out of her carrier then they checked the carrier. After they put Lily back they wanded Laurie, checking for bunny explosives. It was quite a circus. But we calmly endured it all and kept a good attitude about the whole thing. We were able to do that because we were so happy to be going to see Michael and Carissa. The joy of that sustained us through the trip. Joy can do that. The joy of the Lord can be our strength, enable us to do what God calls us to do in this world.

The big question for all of us is how can we have that kind of joy? We think it derives from those precious joyful events that happen in our lives. But as wonderful as those are, they don’t come frequently enough, the joy of them fades, and they are thoroughly interspersed with those unfortunate events that obliterate joy. So how can our joy be complete?

JOY COMES FROM REMAINING IN JESUS

This is where we find a surprising message in these verses. Jesus claimed that if we remain in him, believe he tells us the truth and trust in that, his joy will be in us, and it will be complete, pervading everything in our lives. Well that can’t be right. I’ve known believers in Jesus who were as joyless as anyone I’ve ever known. More commonly, I find that most believers in Jesus are like everybody else. They have joy when joyful things happen in their lives, but when the hard things hit or when they just go through dry, joyless times, they evidence no more joy than the average non-believer. Like everybody else, they have joy when there is reason to have it in their circumstances, and when there isn’t, they don’t have joy.

So where is the joy of Jesus? If Jesus promised remaining in him would bring his joy in our lives, what has gone wrong when that doesn’t happen? More to the point, how can we fix it so we do have that joy? The big fault that we suffer from is we short circuit the connection to Jesus. Remaining in Jesus means sticking to him, trusting that he tells us the truth. So it means we keep believing in him. The biggest joy stopper is we just don’t do that. We keep looking for joy in places other than trusting in Jesus.

Writer Philip Yancey told a story that illustrates the problem. It was something he heard about from his pastor, who decided to pull a big surprise on his four kids. He told them they were all going to have a vacation trip to Junction City, Kansas, where his father had once served as a pastor. He and his wife built up the joys of Junction City. They were going to drive there from their home in Denver. They would get a motel with a swimming pool. There were a number of great playgrounds in Junction City, so they’d play on those. They’d go swimming in the motel pool a lot. There was an ice cream shop they would go to and get ice cream. There was a bowling alley where they would all go bowling. It was going to be great. The kids actually bragged to their skeptical friends about what a cool vacation they were going to have in Junction City. So they made the drive from their home in Denver to Junction City. When they got there they toured the church where his dad had pastored. Then, when the kids were all ready to check into a motel and go swimming he sprung the surprise. He said, “You know what kids, it’s boring here in Junction City. So we’re going to do something else.” At that his wife reached in a bag and pulled out 4 custom made Mickey Mouse hats and he said, “Instead, we’re going to Disney World!” He expected cheers and delight. The surprise was on him. The kids immediately began complaining, “But you said we were going swimming at the motel.” “You promised we could go bowling.” “What about the playgrounds?” For the next few hours he had to endure it as he drove and the complaining children expounded on all the advantages of Junction City over Disney World. They thought what they wanted was Junction City rather than the kid’s promised land of Disney World. Just a bit short sighted, don’t you think?

We kind of do the same thing. Yeah, it’s great that God loves us and forgives us and accepts us into his kingdom, but what we *really* want is better circumstances, maybe better friends, more success, more money, more approval, you fill in the blank. We think these are the things that will give us the joy we want and need. So we focus on them, and we complain if we don’t get them. We choose Junction City over Disney World, and the result is we aren’t believing Jesus, so we don’t experience the joy.

Let’s think again about the nature of joy. It is that great gladness that comes from a deep satisfaction with life, a sense of well being. So the key is having that sense of well being, that satisfaction. This is where what Jesus does in our lives proves to be the answer. Think about a few of the things happen because we remain in Jesus, believe his truth.

First, we are given God’s acceptance and love. Though we may not always understand this is what we long for, that is absolutely foundational to well being. In Jesus, according to Ephesians 1:5 we are adopted as God’s children. We are accepted as beloved children. We don’t have to strive to gain that. It is given to us as a gift in Christ, and nothing can ever change that. Romans 8:38-39 tells us that nothing will ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That one thing brings a sense of well-being to our souls. This is a gift of immeasurable value.

Second, we are given an awareness of our worth. Psychologists say that one of the most urgent drives we have is to somehow prove that we have worth. The Bible calls that righteousness, because it means being given a stamp of approval. Romans 3:22 says righteousness “is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” In Christ, by faith, by remaining in him, we have his stamp of approval. We are declared to be of infinite worth.

This is a huge deal. One of the ways people often try to establish a sense of worth is by succeeding in some career or endeavor. I have seen that this motivation often confuses issues with pastors. They want to serve the kingdom of God, but they also want to “succeed” because it touches on their worth. The result is often skewed priorities and damaged relationships. I felt the pull of that early in ministry. But God worked in a variety of ways to free me from it. Even now, it would be easy to feel the tug of it. Hey, at one point I was fired by a church that I founded and served for more than 30 years. Now I have a tiny church that has absolutely none of the classic indications of what most people think of as ministry success. That could put a ton of pressure on me, except I know that has nothing to do with my worth or my value. My value is in Christ, and that’s all I need.

We have forgiveness in Christ, so we have rest for our souls. We have the confident hope of eternal life in God’s kingdom. We have the knowledge that God is using us in ways we may not even be aware of, so our lives have meaning and purpose. All of these things are essential to our sense of well being, which is where joy is found. We have the sense that God is sovereign and at work in our lives, so we can trust in his will.

Carolyn Arends is a Christian writer, musician and speaker. In an article she wrote in *Christianity Today* she tells about the fact that years ago she toured as an opening act for the late singer Rich Mullins. She said she loved overhearing conversations he would have at the autograph table. She said numerous times fans would ask Rich how they could find God’s will for their lives. He would listen to them attentively, but then offered an unexpected perspective. He’d say, “I don’t think finding God’s plan for you has to be complicated. God’s will is that you love him with all your heart and soul and mind, and that you love your neighbor as yourself. Get busy with that, and then, if God wants you to do something unusual, he’ll take care of it. Say, for example he wants you to go to Egypt.” He would pause for a moment, then flash his grin and say, “If that’s the case, he’ll provide 11 jealous brothers, and they’ll sell you into slavery.”

We can go through life trusting that God is at work. Pastor and author Mark Batterson says God wants to get you where he wants you to go way more than you want to get there, so we can trust him to do that. We can be at peace and be satisfied knowing that God is at work in our circumstances. All we need to do is remain in Jesus.

CONCLUSION

I was thinking about the recent World Series. It was unusual in that it featured 2 teams that were unexpected. It still irks me that if the dumb Padres had won a measly 2 more games they could have been there rather than Arizona. However, that’s not the main point here. We watched the end of the series. Texas won 5-0, but it was a nail biter until just before the end. There were some guys on Texas that didn’t have very good games. But you wouldn’t have been able to tell that from looking at them. Every single one of them was rejoicing and deliriously happy. The reason is they had something terrific, something that totally outweighed any negative. They were the World Champions, and that was all that mattered. They were an example that it is possible to have something so good it eclipses the negative. It gives joy in spite of any negatives.

REJOICE IN THE JOY OF GRACE

We need to remember what we have in Christ. We have the well being that is the source of unbroken joy. In Christ we are all going to be all right. We are approved and accepted by God. We are forgiven and loved. We have unlimited worth in Christ, and have nothing to prove. God has us. He is guiding us, getting us where we need to go, so we can be at peace. We need not fret.

PURSUE THE MISSION

This is a matter of keeping our eyes on the ball. The more we focus on what our lives are to be about, the more joy we will have, for our mission will be fulfilled.

DON’T GET DISTRACTED BY TOYS

This past week one day Laurie and I picked up little Wesley from his pre-school. I was surprised when he came out of his class that he made a bee line for another room. Usually he’s ready to go to the car and head for home, but not this day. It turned out that his school was having a Book Fair, where parents could buy books for kids. I was pleased to see that Wesley was so eager to get a book. The room was full of books but he knew exactly which one he wanted. I soon found out why. This was a Matchbox book, and it came with a Matchbox car. He really didn’t care abou the book. He wanted that toy car, which was much the same as the 20,000 Matchbox cars he already has. It won’t make the least bit of difference in his life. The toys and temporary joys of this world are fine and we should enjoy them. But we must never forget they cannot give what we have in Christ.

During our recent dumpster fire of a vacation Laurie and I had hoped to go to several restaurants for dinner. We made it to one before the plague hit us. After that we didn’t go out because we had no appetite at all. Plus we figured other diners would not be real happy to be around us. So we ordered room service chicken soup. When we called to order it Laurie informed them that we were both sick with Covid. The servers just left the food outside our door. They knocked and ran. Forget getting a tip, they just wanted to avoid any contact with us. So there we were, after flying hours to get to a beautiful tropical location, cooped up in our hotel room, eating chicken soup and feeling wretched. It wasn’t a joyful thing. We didn’t enjoy it. We were disappointed, but we still had that sense of well being that comes from knowing God loves us, that he has a plan for our lives for our good. If we had the vacation we wanted but not what we have in Christ we would not have had well being. We would not have lasting joy. But despite the disappointment of that disastrous trip, we still had and continue to have joy. So what we could do is thank God for his grace and his goodness to us. One of the best things we can do is give thanks in all things, focusing on our security in Christ and on the many blessings God gives.