

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, September 9, 2007  
Rev. John Tapscott

“TAKE DELIGHT IN THE LORD”

Isaiah 58:14

Some of you learned the Christian faith from the Catechism, that basic summary of Christian faith and practice in question and answer form. The first question in the Catechism is, “What is the chief end of man?” And the answer: “The chief end of man is to enjoy God and glorify him forever.” Does that strike you as odd? Enjoying God may not be the first thing that comes to mind in our relationship with Him. Yet there is a whole theme in the Bible of God inviting his people to enjoy Him and to take delight in Him.

When we lived in Halifax I had a friend who had a lovely backyard full of prized roses. For an hour or more on Monday afternoons we would sit there on lawn chairs with a cup of tea and shortbread cookies, enjoying his flowers, the warm summer sunshine and conversation on music and sports and theology. I delighted in those afternoons, and in my friend too, in his wit and wisdom.

Do we delight in God that way? Now there are times to approach God with awe and reverence, for Scripture tells us our God is a consuming fire. But it also tells us that we can delight in God and come to God as a child comes to a loving parent, with joy and confidence and trust. Isaiah 58:14, “Then you shall take delight in the Lord.” I believe that our Christian faith and worship would be transformed if we could regain a sense of taking delight in the Lord and enjoying Him. Isaiah suggests that there are certain steps we can take in order for it to happen. “Do these,” Isaiah is saying, “Then you shall take delight in the Lord.”

*The first step to delighting in the Lord is to know God first as the burden lifter, rather than the burden giver.*

Often we come here wondering “What heavy burden is God going to lay on me today?” In a Simpson’s episode Homer is watching TV at home on Sunday morning. Suddenly God overshadows the house and rips off the roof. God says, “Homer Simpson, you’ve forsaken my church.” Simpson looks up and says in a trembling voice, “But God, I work hard all week, and Sunday is my day off, and besides church is boring and all they do is tell me how bad I am.” God pauses for a moment and says, “Hmm, Simpson, you’ve got a point.” But that’s the common view of church - boring and burdensome. And if you think of God as the burden-giver, it’s hard to take delight in the Lord, to enter joyfully and expectantly into his

presence.

But the Bible tells us that God is first the burden lifter before he is the burden giver. In Luke 13 we read that Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath. A woman with a crippling spirit appeared, her back bent over. Jesus saw her, called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." He laid his hands on her and she stood up and began praising God.

You see, all of us come here with some burden which is weighing us down and bending us over. It may be a physical ailment, but more likely it's a burden which can only be seen in the signs of sleeplessness and stress which line your face. You may come here with a burden of care, of overwork, of anxiety. You may come bent over by sin and failure and a sense of inadequacy. You may come concerned about the future, perhaps about your health and your mortality. You may come with a burden over your marriage or your children or your job or your finances. Truthfully, all of us bring some burden here that prevents us from standing up straight.

But there is one who sees us as we come through these doors. And his Name is Jesus, the Crucified and Risen Son of God. Jesus is here among us, doing God's work. Not one of us is too bent over to escape his notice. And in love, Jesus is reaching out to touch you so that you can walk taller and straighter, so that you can go from here with new courage, a new perspective and with the strength of the Holy Spirit. Christ may not completely lift the burden from you, though that could happen. But at the least you and I will go from here feeling the weight of our burdens less than before.

Christ does this now because he did it once. The burden of sin and guilt and death is the biggest burden that humans carry, and it is impossible to throw off on our own. So Christ willingly took our place and as he died on the Cross our burden of sin and guilt and separation from God was lifted from us and put onto him. And from the Cross flows the mercy of God, which forgives us and makes us children of God forever, heirs of immortality, possessors of eternal life. This is God's free gift to each one of us who has put our trust in Christ. And the Risen One is still carrying out his burden lifting work among us. This is the first thing the Lord does as we come here on this Sabbath day. He sees us and touches us in order to lift our burden or bear it with us and to help us walk taller and straighter. Today Christ is saying, "Child of God, my friend, I am making your burden my burden. I am giving you my strength so you can cope with it, for I am the burden bearer."

So many times people have said to me, "I came to church today feeling weighed down with some burden, but now I feel stronger, confident, more peaceful. I know that the Lord is with me and now the burden doesn't seem so great. I have hope."

Once, twenty-five years ago, I was facing a difficult situation at work. It seemed like Mount Everest that I would never conquer. I was anxious and troubled. But one Sunday afternoon, I attended a retreat with some members of my church, and on the way home, I felt God's peace. The situation was still there, but the Lord had touched me and assured me that I would get through it. And with his help I did.

Now there is a sense in which Christ puts a burden on those who follow him. But it is a different and easier burden than the world gives. Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." There can be a burden that comes from worship, a challenge that comes from God's word, something that we must do to help set things right in our personal situation or in the world. But before Christ gives us this burden, he does something about the burdens we bring with us. This is the house of standing up straight. Know God first *not* as the burden giver, but the burden lifter and burden bearer. "Then you shall take delight in the Lord."

*The second step to taking delight in the Lord is to honour the Sabbath.*

Through Isaiah God spoke to his people, "If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath...if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable; if you honour it, not going your own way; serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord..." (58:13,14)

When Jesus set the woman free, criticism followed. The leader of the synagogue said, "There are six days to be healed so come on those days and be cured; not on the Sabbath." Jesus upbraided his critics for hypocrisy. They watered their animals on a Sabbath, so surely a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound for eighteen years could be set free from her bondage on the Sabbath.

Now it's easy to condemn the synagogue leader. But let's see what's going on here. The Sabbath was God's gift to Israel. Keeping it honoured God and spoke to the surrounding nations of Almighty God. The Sabbath was not a day for work or profit, but a day to rest and to worship. Doctors could work on the Sabbath only if it was an emergency, and since this woman had been bound for eighteen years, one more day wouldn't matter. The rules which surrounded the Sabbath seem extreme, but the desire to honour God's gift was a good one. Now what the synagogue leader didn't see was that Jesus was no ordinary physician. In Jesus this woman had been touched and healed by the Son of God. If anyone could heal on the Sabbath it was Jesus, because He is Lord of the Sabbath. He was with his Father when the Sabbath was created. Jesus healed on the Sabbath because he is greater than the Sabbath.

Quite frankly, God's people today need 1/10th of the respect for the Sabbath that our ancestors had. Now we don't expect the secular world to honour the Sabbath. I've been told that one of the busiest times in grocery stores is Sunday mornings. And just drive by the malls on your way home today and see how many cars are already there. Sadly, Christ followers have let the secular world lead us on this. We've trampled the holy day, the day of resurrection, the day Christ rose from the dead. We've loaded it up with so many activities that time spent in God's presence is crowded out. It's no wonder our lives are so troubled and our minds are so confused. We're more informed by the secular world-view which binds us than by the truth of God's word which sets us free.

I have no desire to go back to a restrictive Sunday, but I believe that Christ-followers need to be more intentional about honouring the Sabbath. We are different than the secular world. We are Christ's witnesses to the world. And whenever we can, we need to set aside time on the Sabbath to come into God's presence. We need to let the Lord touch our hearts and minds with his burden-lifting power and truth. Then we will accept the Sabbath not as a burden, but God's gift for our blessing. "Call the Sabbath a delight, and the holy day of the Lord honourable" says Isaiah, "then you shall take delight in the Lord."

*One more further step which will help us to take delight in the Lord is to care for the needy among us.*

Isaiah writes in 58: 10 "If you offer your food to the hungry, and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall arise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday."

So much of our dissatisfaction and unhappiness comes because we're focussed inward on ourselves and our own problems. But God says, "Do something for someone who can't help themselves. Be a good neighbour to someone, and your whole perspective will change."

Many people have told me how the simple act of looking beyond themselves and doing something for another has transformed their whole outlook. Light arose in their darkness and their gloom became like the noonday. When you do a simple act of kindness for someone, especially for the hungry and the afflicted, you are aligning your heart with God's heart, who has a special concern for the poor and the needy. When you help lift another's burden, you find the Lord lifting your own. You begin to realize just how good and faithful God has been to you and to the church, providing us with resources and strength to care for one another. "Offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted," says Isaiah, "then you shall take delight in the Lord."