# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Fruit of the Spirit: Joy”**

**John 15:9-12**

 **December 19, 2021**

Christian author Max Lucado tells the story of a King. The King’s first home was a magnificent palace. His name was known and loved; his will was respected and obeyed. There was no King greater than he. And then, he had nothing. One moment he was royalty; the next he was in poverty. He slept where he could, often on the ground. He was dependent on the support of others for his food. He had no income. In his kingdom he had been revered; now he was ridiculed. Some tried to kill him, others thought him crazy. He was accused of a crime he hadn’t committed. Witnesses were paid to lie. The jury was rigged. The death penalty was decreed. He was killed and buried in a borrowed tomb. Though he once had everything, he died with nothing.

He should have been miserable at the way he was treated. He should have been bitter towards those who abused him. But he wasn’t. This King, this Jesus, lived joy, a resilient kind of joy in the face of the worst the world could do to him. His was a joy that refused to bend to the naysayers, a joy that held its ground against pain, a joy whose roots extended deep into the foundation of his Father’s love. As the writer of Hebrews says: “For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross, scorning its shame” (Hebrews 12:2). His was a joy that the world hadn’t given him. Therefore, the world couldn’t take it away. The cross couldn’t take it away, the desertion of his friends couldn’t take it away, the hatred of his opponents couldn’t take it away. The source of his joy was in heaven, and no earthly trouble could take it away. I invite you to turn with me to John 15:9-12 and listen to the words of Jesus as he tells his disciples about this joy

“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.”

It is the relationship between himself and his heavenly Father that fills Jesus with joy. And it is this very same kind of relationship of love between them and the Father that Jesus desires for his disciples, for then their lives will be filled with joy, as well. The key to joy is knowing its source. True joy, lasting joy, the joy which the Bible speaks of as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, is only found in our relationship with God. The joy that heaven gives cannot be stolen by anything that happens in this world. The world couldn’t steal joy from Jesus, and it can’t steal joy from you or from me so long as our joy is rooted in the love of God for us and our love for him and for each other.

C.S. Lewis is my favorite author. He is most famous for writing the Narnia Chronicles about a land where children from our world live out amazing adventures, but he also wrote another 30 or so books on the Christian life including his spiritual autobiography *Surprised by Joy.* As a boy, Lewis grew up being taken to church and generally believing in God, but as a young man he became an atheist after experiencing the horrors of trench warfare as a British soldier in WW1. Watching friends die horribly before his very eyes convinced him that there was no God in the universe – how could there be when such suffering and evil were all around him? Still, he longed for something to give his life meaning.

After he came back from the war he returned to college and there he began to run into Christians. At first he loved to debate them and show them how ridiculous their faith was – he was a brilliant man. Yet, there was something about these Christians and their view of life that attracted him. He befriended several Christians who shared with him about their personal relationship with God, and slowly he came to realize something quite astounding: there was a growing sense within him that he was indeed loved by something or someone in the universe, something or someone beyond his human understanding. The longing in his heart for love, his yearning for that “something” beyond himself and this world, was being answered. Finally, he believed that there was a God who wanted to personally connect with him, and he accepted Jesus Christ as the way into that connection. The word he used to describe this answer to his deepest longings was *joy*, and as the title of his book declares, he was quite surprised that this kind of *joy* even existed and was available to him.

Lewis experienced the feeling of joy as an inner emotion that met a very real need within himself, but he knew that it was a feeling that pointed beyond itself. It pointed to a God who loved him and wanted to be in a mutual love relationship with him. Nothing on earth could produce that kind of joy, but heaven had come down and placed it in his heart. And, since earth hadn’t produced it, earth would not be able to take it away.

What will be the source of your joy this Christmas season? Will you look to some earthly source and then hope to hang on to it? A family gathering, the healing of a broken relationship, a time of quiet and rest? All of these are good in and of themselves, but they cannot bring about true joy. Families will squabble, relationships will falter, the pressures of this world will intrude, and that kind of joy will fade as quickly as it came. Instead, enjoy these things when they come, but trust in your relationship with God for true, deep, lasting joy. Then you will be filled with his joy. Yes, your joy will be complete.