

July 30, 2017

Christian Joy is a Serendipity

PRAYER

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN

SERMON

There's an old Persian legend about the three princes of Serendib which is modern day Sri Lanka. And these princes are dearly loved by their father. The father is concerned for their well-being. And he wants them to have all the wisdom and knowledge they will need to rule the kingdom justly and faithfully when they assume responsibility. And so, he sends them out on a journey of discovery to a faraway land. He wants to send them on this journey of discovery so that they will learn all they need to know to be effective as rulers of the kingdom. And along this journey they have a number of encounters and adventures in which they use their sagacity and knowledge to solve the challenges that they are facing. In each of these challenges, there is a very positive, a very good, and surprising outcome. Something that is totally unexpected.

The legend gave birth to the word serendipity. Which means an unexpected, pleasant discovery. A serendipity is something that is found as a byproduct for the search of something else. It's a surprise. It's unexpected. It's a wonderful outcome. And there are many serendipities. Some of them are microwave ovens, and post it notes, and Velcro.

Percy Spencer was an engineer working on radar. And one day he noticed that the candy bar in his pocket melted when it encountered the radar waves. He thought about it and eureka the microwave oven was born.

Spencer Silver was a man who worked for a company that developed a glue and the company had found no use for it. Well he got frustrated one Sunday when he was at church and the little strips of paper he stuck in his hymnal to mark the pages and he must have been a Episcopalian (laughter) to mark the pages kept falling out and he kept losing his place. And then he remembered that the company had invented this non-permanent glue and they never found a use for. He put two and two together and eureka post-it notes were born.

George de Mestral was a Swiss engineer. And was out hiking one day and came back and his pants were just covered with stik-tites. And that was aggravating but when he'd start picking them off he wondered what is it that makes them stick like that. And so, he began exploring and looking. It's not something you can see with a naked eye, but when you look at it under a microscope you could see that there were just hundreds and hundreds of little hooks on those stik-tites. And he began working with it, working with it and eureka Velcro was the result of his investigation. It took him 10 years to develop it and it didn't become popular until the

astronauts started using Velcro on their spacesuits. But once that happened it took off and we have Velcro.

Serendipity, an unexpected discovery, a pleasant surprise. When you stop to think about it the joy of the kingdom of God is the serendipity. It's not something we find by pursuing it. The joy of the kingdom of God is the byproduct of a quest for a deeper relationship with God. We see that principle of serendipity at work in the story of Solomon that was read as the first lesson this morning. When Solomon becomes king, he is very young and naïve. And when God asks him I'll give you whatever you want, what is it? He asks for a discerning mind. He says that he doesn't even know how to go out and come in. What he means by that is he has no idea of the protocol and pomp and circumstance of being king. He has no idea of what he is supposed to do. And so, he asks God to grant him wisdom, to grant him a discerning mind so that he can rule over the people justly. And so that he can rule in a way that God wants him to rule over the people. He may be young. He may be naïve but he's smart enough to know that the pleasures of the palace are mighty thin apart from a relationship with God.

The serendipity for Solomon is that because of the wisdom, because of the discerning mind that God grants him. Not only does Israel become incredibly wealthy and prosperous as a nation. Solomon gains great wealth. His quest is not for wealth. His quest is for that deep and abiding relationship with God. His quest is for knowledge that comes out of that abiding relationship with God. Serendipity is the byproduct, the wealth is the byproduct of that quest for the deep and abiding relationship with God.

The joy of the kingdom of God is a serendipity. It's not something we find by pursuing it. It's a byproduct of our pursued relationship with God. After all, who of us would ever think that joy is found in a pursuit of selflessness. In a pursuit of servanthood. That's not where we would normally look to find joy. And yet those who find the joy of the kingdom of God find it there in that pursuit of a relationship with God that expresses itself in a life of service to others.

The Jewish people do not have a creed like we do. They don't have the equivalent of the Nicene Creed, or the Apostles Creed, or the Athenation's Creed. The one guiding principle for their faith they have is the Shammah. Which is the statement that they are to love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their mind. And to love their neighbor as their self. Jesus picks up on that when he is asked what is the great commandment. And he says on these two hang all the law and the prophets. It is love for God and love for the neighbor that leads us into that deep relationship with God where we find that joy of the kingdom.

In his book, *Tough Times Don't Last Tough People Do*, Robert Schuler tells the story of Florence Nightingale. Florence Nightingale was a brilliant young woman who was born into a family that had great social status and wealth. And yet despite that social status and wealth, by the time she was 31 years old she was burned out. She wondered whether or not life was worth it. She actually considered suicide. But as she came through that time of depression. She realized that

social status and wealth were not something that was meaningful to her. What was meaningful to her was to find a way to give her life in service to others.

And so, she began thinking about her options and then decided she wanted to become a nurse. When her parents found out they were horrified. And they were vehement urging Florence Nightingale to do something else. And it was with good reason. You see at that time, nurses were not trained caregivers. Most nurses were prostitutes and other low lives. So, it's understandable why her family would be appalled at the notion of Florence becoming a nurse.

When the Crimean war broke out, Florence decided to go the front lines to care for the wounded. And when she did that there were many people who literally thought she was insane. But despite what other people thought, despite the objections of her parents Florence followed her heart and her faith. She spent three years on the front lines in Crimea tending to the wounded. Wiping their blood, cleaning their wounds, bandaging their amputations when their limbs were taken. Spent three years doing that. And she didn't stop there, when she came home she worked on her notes and published her work. And her work was seminal in developing the type of care we have today in hospitals. You and I benefit today because of Florence Nightingale because she chose to follow her heart and her faith rather than to give in to the wants and desires and expectations of her family and society.

She found the joy of the kingdom of God in a life of servanthood and a life of service to others. Now what is true for Florence Nightingale is true for you and me today. We will never find the joy of the kingdom of God simply pursuing joy. We find it as we pursue that deeper relationship with God expressed in a life of discipleship and servanthood. Following Jesus' command to love one another as I have loved you.

PRAYER

May that peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts, and your minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN