

New Testament: Acts 5: 38 - 42
Gospel Reading: Luke 15: 1 - 7

Please pray with me. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

There is something in the ethos, in the cultural milieu of First Presbyterian Church Lexington that makes it such that celebration or rejoicing is *not* the first thing that comes to mind. I do not rightly know the “why?” behind this phenomenon and truly, for our purposes today, it only matters a little bit but not hardly at all. So let me speculate for just a brief moment because said speculation will enable me to tie the concept of celebration into not needing to fear.

This particular congregation, from what I know, had a fairly large number of German immigrants. The German people in and of themselves have not historically been big party people, Oktoberfest notwithstanding. I’ve heard stories of ancestors here in First Presbyterian who continued to honor their heritage and their German language, but abruptly stopped living out their German origins in response to German aggressions in WWI and WWII. All of sudden, people went from being perhaps loud and boisterous, to doing everything possible to go unnoticed and not draw attention to themselves. They were afraid to be identified as German. That produces general trauma. Even if your German ancestors did not specifically tell you “go unnoticed and do not draw attention to yourself” by carrying themselves in such a manner, by behaving in certain ways and not doing certain things, it carried down into subsequent generations. And fear, I would say appropriate fear, did that.

Perhaps this antagonism towards celebration stems from the blurry line between humble rejoicing over good things and good accomplishments and prideful arrogance. Perhaps there is an unspoken fear of coming across as braggadocious and not humble which gives people pause when trying to share about all the good things the church is doing, and all the good ways the church is impacting the community. So once again, perhaps, fear is hindering our celebration of ourselves.

Well friends, Jesus and the disciples would disagree with our letting these fears hinder our rejoicing. I’m going to bypass the reading from Acts but I will say, for future consideration, as the United States continues to slip deeper and deeper into moral decay, there will come a time when we have to decide that enough is enough and be prepared to rejoice that we were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. In Luke 15 Jesus offers three parables back to back to back that, while not exclusively about celebration and rejoicing, certainly encourage it as a response! For our

purposes today, First Presbyterian Church of Lexington, Jesus is telling us we are allowed to rejoice and celebrate! The man who had a hundred sheep and lost one, found it, called his friends and neighbors together and told them rejoice with me, celebrate with me! The woman with ten silver coins and lost one, found it, called her friends and neighbors together and told them rejoice with me, celebrate with me! The father with two sons lost one, found him, and threw the most giant rager party you can imagine! Jesus endorses celebration which means there is no fear in celebration.

Let's do a little practice celebrating. 2024 was the first year since I've been here, and even several years before that, our giving outpaced our spending; we ended the year in the black! In 2023, we donated \$1,946.70 to local organizations here in Lexington. Last year, we donated \$1,641.50 to local organizations here in Lexington. Through last month, we've donated \$402 to local organizations here in Lexington. We provide food baskets every summer in collaboration with our Methodist friends to food insecure families right here in our community. We host Mid Platte Valley Taekwondo. We host Dariz Daycare. We are making a difference in our community. In 2023, we donated \$1,822.62 to denominational efforts across the country and across the world. In 2024, we donated \$2,868.25 to denominational efforts across the country and across the world highlighted by a doubling of our donation to the Christmas Joy offering which offers support for Presbyterian church workers and their families. We have two new Joy Ringers! We have a rousing competitive spirit which means that we're all about to go eat a bunch of good food!

I've started the celebration, now it's up to all of us to keep it right on going! There is no fear in celebration! Amen.