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Series on Jude: The Beloved

Jude 24-25

Title: Surprised by Joy

To be delivered to Trinity Presbyterian Church (viz Zoom), February 28, 2021

Big Idea: The promise of joy in heaven is ours to enjoy right now

Time with Young Christians

Do you like to go on dates with your parents? Maybe a trip to the park? Maybe the water slides? Maybe stomping through the forest together?

If you're going to walk from your house to the park, I bet you never worry that Mum and Dad will get lost on the way home, right? It probably doesn't even cross your mind, because it's your favourite park and they're your parents! There is something absolutely wonderful about not even knowing that getting lost is a possibility because we really, really, really trust our parents.

We walk holding hands to the park, or we even ride our bikes there. And, pretty soon, you know your way to the park, too, don't you?

Well, it's the same with our Father in Heaven, children. Our Father is always with us through the Spirit. We aren't alone, and we aren't left to find our way to the park on our own because Jesus, through his Spirit, is always with us. That's a great promise to remember, and to tuck away for when we might get worried about being lost in life.

Let's pray.

Sermon

24 Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, 25 to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Have you ever been lost? Even worse, have you ever felt the despair of being abandoned because of something you did?

In 2016, the BBC published a story of Seven-year-old Yamato from Japan, who was throwing rocks at people during a family outing. His parents wanted to teach him a lesson, so they

pulled over by the side of a road next to the woods, removed him from the car, and drove away. They returned five minutes later, hoping that their punishment had worked. But Yamato was gone.

Yamato remained missing for six days. The woods had tall grass and plants that the search party needed to comb through to be sure that they didn't miss finding him, in case his body was lying on the ground. It was cold at night, and it also rained, which made it seem even more hopeless to find him alive.

Meanwhile, Yamato honestly believed that his parents had abandoned him because of his bad behavior. He decided to go deeper into the woods to look for shelter. After walking for 5 kilometers, Yamato came upon an empty military base with small huts. He opened the door of one and found a thin mattress on the floor. He was able to sleep comfortably. But aside from drinking rainwater, he had nothing to eat for six days.

When the search party finally found him, Yamato was taken to the hospital. Aside from hunger and mild hypothermia, he physically recovered. However, since he was very literally left behind for so long, there is no telling how much Yamato will be traumatized by this psychologically.

And, I don't think it is too great of an assumption to make that when he was finally found that his parents didn't respond with great joy, but likely with deep shame and profound guilt over their mistake.

If you ever have been where Yamato was, Jesus has good news for you. In fact, Yamato's story would best be described as a story of *contrast* because Jesus does not punish us by leaving us to stumble and wander through life. He does not guide us by abandoning us. His does not teach us by psychologically abusing us. And, *His* response to our homecoming isn't shame or guilt. His response and our response to our homecoming is starkly different from Yamato and his parents. But what is it, I wonder?

As we come to the end of Jude, we might think Jude will end with a warning for us to follow rightly the way of Jesus or a hint of the judgement that will come to those false teachers or instructions on how to live right now. But that's not Jude's big idea at the end of his letter. Surprisingly, Jude ends with a promise of what Jesus will do for us, and then what the response is to that promise—both Christ's response and our response. But I'm getting ahead of myself . . .

To start us off today, let's look together at the promises of what Jesus is able to do for us that Yamato's parents didn't. Verse 24 says,

“Jesus is able to keep you from falling and to make you stand without blemish.”

How does Jesus keep us from falling and keep us from blemish? Let's look at this together.

1. Without Falling (slide)

So first, of all, there are lots of reasons why we might wonder if we will fall.

- For the early church, as we've learned in earlier sermons, they were in grave danger of falling because of false teachers, and it's the same for us. But what else may cause us to fall?
- Weakness can cause us to fall. It's when horses are weak and injured that they stumble and fall. And so too, with us, when we are weak physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually—it is in these moments or seasons that we are especially vulnerable. So
- What about roads and paths we have to travel that we're not familiar with? For example, you find yourself trying to balance family, work, church, and private life. So, the unknown and many pathways colliding can cause us to fall.
- Or, the pace of life can cause us to fall. We do alright if we're just walking, but if we get going too fast, that's when we start to stumble.
- And loads we have to carry can cause us to fall. You marry and assume your spouse's debt, a pandemic comes to the globe and causes a chain reaction of all kinds of turmoil that we never thought we'd have to go through. So, loads can cause us to fall.
- Or what about prosperity and comfort? When life gets easy, we can forget our Maker, and this can cause us to stumble. Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher, gave this analogy of prosperity: "If there has been a thaw and then the frost comes on at night, the road may be very pretty to look at, but it is very troublesome to travel on."

But, Jude says that falling is not the destiny of the redeemed. Jesus is able to keep us from falling, Jude promises. Paul agrees with Jude when he proclaims in Romans 8:35-39 (slide)

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written:

*"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Well, what is our response to the faithfulness of God?

There is perhaps no story I have known that verifies the truth of these words than the story of Corrie and Betsy ten Boom. These two spinster watchmakers, who lived a simple and quiet life in Holland, responded to God's love for them by hiding Jews from Nazis in World War 2. Corrie and Betsy were eventually found out by the Nazis and taken to a concentration camp. Betsy, dying of exposure, with her dying breath told Corrie, "You must tell them. God will give us the love to be able to forgive our enemies. You must tell them that there is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still."

Jesus makes us more than conquerors through a love that is powerful enough to keep us from falling. And so friends, our response to this great truth is to remind ourselves of the promise of Jesus that when we feel weak, when we face the unknown, when life is experienced as a heavy load, or the temptation of prosperity calls to us. It's not a promise that life will be easy. Rather, Jesus promises to keep us from falling. For Corrie, had she grown bitter towards the Nazi's rather than forgiving them, she would have fallen. Rather, she embraced the grace of Jesus that allowed her to forgive and to love. Only Jesus can do this for us. All that is ours to do is accept and embrace his promise. Jesus will not abandon us. Jesus will not let us fall.

2. Without Fault (slide)

Second, we might wonder if through all our dangers, toils, and snares that we won't end up in Heaven merely as damaged goods. So, Jude promises that we are going to be presented before a great and holy God without fault. Christians, it is our glorious destiny to be faultless before Christ. We will not be damaged goods, we will not be torn and frazzled. This truth is staggering to me because here in the right now it is so easy to see my own faults, like the fault of worry. When I work so hard to put an end to worry that pulls me away from the love of God, and find worry lingering still, I can remember with confidence that Jesus will present me before his Father without blame. Recall with me the words of this great hymn,

*When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of the guilt within
Upward I look, and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin*

As we press on in our Christian faith, we can rest assured that Satan and self will not win the day, that evil will not ultimately win. We will yet sin, but as our hearts long to be like Jesus and to follow Jesus until the very end, we can rest assured in Jesus' promise that in the end we will be declared fully good and fully shameless.

And so what is our response to this, friends? What would your response be if you found out not only that you would never be abandoned but that you also will end your life without shame and without this nagging feeling of not being enough, or not good enough, or not holy enough? What would your response be?

I've waited until now to explain the title of my sermon, which is "Surprised By Joy" because as we read the text, we are surprised by the word joy! (slide) *"Jesus is able to present us faultless before his presence with great joy!"*

We don't cross the finish line grumbling; but when we are presented spotless before God on that great day and our response is nothing less than pure joy! Joy in who Jesus is for us, joy in seeing him face to face, joy in being kept day after day throughout all our days, joy in finally coming home,

joy that cannot be taken away. But there's more surprise. Is our joy the only joy in heaven? Is Jesus' response to our homecoming like Yamato's parents?

I remember growing up my farmer Dad wishfully reminiscing about his favourite tool that had gone missing. Countless fences, shacks, roofs, houses, and odd-ball inventions were made by Dad using his trusty hammer. I remember Dad regaling how this hammer had the force to snap a 2x4 in half with barely any effort on his part. As a kid, I remember trying to buy Dad replacement hammers on various Father's Days, but somehow, they lacked the strong, slim, and sharp edge that the neck of Dad's beloved old hammer had. As kids, we would search high and low in the farm buildings, hoping just maybe to find that hammer one day and surprise Dad with it.

Well, time went by and the hammer just refused to be found. Then, in the spring of 2012 Southern Alberta had such massive flooding that the flood ruined the foundation of the old farm house and forced my parents to rebuild it from the ground up. It took years of careful work, taking out old foundations, rooms, and rugs; then replacing, adding, and reimagining how to build a dream home for the grandchildren to come back to.

Now, like most farmhouses that are hours away from civilization, our basement boasted of a cold room whose walls were lined with musty cement and whose shelves were filled with canned pickles and apples. Eventually, the time came to renovate that old cold room and so can by can, shelf by shelf, the cold room was emptied as Dad and my brothers slowly dismantled and readied it for transformation. When almost every scrap of the old cold room was removed, the boys began dismantling even the ceiling. And to their amazement, sitting rather tirelessly on a rafter in the ceiling was Dad's old faithful hammer. A sense of almost disbelief and ecstasy filled them as they excitedly called up the stairs to Dad to come and see the treasure they had found. Although age had perhaps condemned some of Dad's physique, and no longer able to wield it with the same force of his youth, the sheer joy over being reunited could not be diminished. With pride and exceeding joy, Dad now uses his beloved hammer, endeared to him all the more by its unlikely return.

Jesus, in the Gospels, tells a similar parable of the Lost Son returning home and the Lost Coin finally being found by the diligent woman. The joy in heaven friends is mutual: we are presented before God with great joy and God meets us with great joy!

And what is our response in the here and now? What is our experience of joy in the here and now? I've waited until now to share my big idea for the sermon, because just as we've been surprised that the primary emotion in heaven is not relief or shame or this feeling of "I barely made it" but is pure joy. And so too, we are surprised that the promise of this future joy gives us joy in the here and now!

And so here's my Big Idea: The promise of Joy in heaven is ours to enjoy right now! (slide)

Unlike Yamato, even though we may be traveling through many dangers, toils, and snares, we do not do so alone and we most certainly do not do so because God is punishing us or risking

our very lives in an attempt to fit us for Heaven. Rather, Jesus is present with us through his Spirit as we journey towards our eternal home—and his presence brings great joy. Because Jesus is with us right now friends, joy is ours to experience and joy is ours to savour.

A friend I met in Switzerland who was trying to make sense of her husband's faithlessness and the threat of a stilted life she now felt was before her went through a difficult journey of healing. My friend Kathy recalled to me that it was the promise and experience of Jesus' joy that saw her through the disappointment and heartbreak of her husband's flimsy love. Kathy distinguished this joy as something that, unlike her husband's affections, wasn't flimsy or fleeting. Kathy said to me, "Happiness is an ice cream cone. Joy is a presence that stays with you through the nightmare."

The eternal and present gift of the Beloved, friends, is joy.

And so brothers and sisters, our response in the here and now is to cling to Jesus with joy. We find joy, even in the pain because we know that it is Jesus who works all things together for his glory and for our joy.

Friends, where do you need to see the joy of Christ coming to meet you right now? It might be loneliness from the pandemic. It might be that you find yourself as the Father in the story of the Prodigal Son, anxiously longing for your child to come home. It may be the worries and cares of life. Pause with me here and invite Jesus into your everyday life, wherever it is you are in your journey.

Father, would you meet us with your joy in our life? May we experience your joy right now. We trust the goodness of Jesus who will not punish us but will keep us secure. And we trust the Holy Spirit to guide us on our journey to the New Heaven and New Earth. May we be welcomed and known as the Beloved. Come Lord Jesus. Come.

Benediction

Children of God,

Called to joy,

Remember this Jesus who redeemed you, is redeeming you, and will redeem you.

24 Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, 25 to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.