

Do all of you know what I mean when I say

DOING WHAT COMES NATURALLY?

You probably do, because you see people doing what comes naturally all the time!

I often see new babies at the Birthplace at Willamette Falls Hospital.

They don’t need to be taught to sneeze, or cry, or suck their tiny thumbs.

All that comes naturally!

We got a mammoth snowstorm last December. 18 inches deep! Remember?

But we didn’t have to remind all the grade school kids to go out and throw snowballs!

They were programmed to do that. It came naturally.

When my daughters began dating, I didn’t have to instruct them about the mechanics of hand-holding or good-night kissing.

Those things, too, come naturally!

So do lots of other things.

Things that aren’t so good... or child-like... or innocent...

like grabbing things away from others

lying and cheating

losing our tempers

and getting drunk

When people go wrong, when they get in trouble,

we’re saddened, but not really surprised, for we know that all these things are part of our HUMAN NATURE.

“Boys will be boys,” we say.

“I’m only human,” we say.

It doesn’t make things right, of course, but it does explain a great deal.

It affirms what the Bible tells us about ourselves:

WE DON’T HAVE TO BE TAUGHT TO SIN. That comes naturally.

And because SIN comes to us so naturally, so do its consequences.

Every one of us sitting here this morning will grow OLD
and every one of us will DIE.

Ever since Adam and Eve,
SIN and AGING and DEATH have all come “naturally” for us humans.

In this sermon, however, I’m here to tell you that God has a DIFFERENT IDEA
about how life could be lived.

In Paul’s letter to the church at Thessalonica is a summons from God –
a call to do what DOESN’T COME NATURALLY...

Read the Text

REJOICE ALWAYS?

Even when the kids are sick?...and I’m depressed?
And I discover a nasty dent in my car door at the shopping center?

PRAY CONSTANTLY?

Even when I’m on the go?... or on vacation?
And my neighbor’s loud party has awakened me at 3 a.m.?

GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES?

All? Even when my retirement income has shriveled? Or I’ve lost my job?
Or my spouse died?

Yes, says Paul!

**“Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances,
because THIS IS THE WILL OF GOD in Christ Jesus for you.”**

Each time we come to the Lord’s Table, we hear it again:

“It is truly meet, right, and salutary that we should AT ALL TIMES
AND IN ALL PLACES give thanks ...”

We say “AMEN” to it again and again,
but do we really think about what we’re saying?
That God is here calling us to do what DOESN’T COME NATURALLY.

How UNNATURAL it is, and how very HARD, becomes clear if we take an
honest look at ourselves. Take inventory with me for a moment...

REJOICE ALWAYS. Do we?

Certainly I rejoice **SOMETIMES**.

When the doctor says “All clear!” And the bills are paid.
And quarrels are settled....and we’re in the mood!

But “always”?

It cannot be, we say. No one can be happy all the time.
We are suspicious, in fact, of those who seem constantly cheerful.

A mistrust of joy has dogged the church over the years.

One group of missionaries in Africa a century ago
told a tribal group that once they were baptized, they could no longer
dance their tribal dances!

Neighboring tribes referred to the converted people as
“the people who have given up dancing”!

Does that describe us? Sitting, not dancing?

Afraid of joy because we are so accustomed to sadness?

PRAY CONSTANTLY. Do we?

I am not asking whether we pray eagerly, willingly.
Only whether or not we make a constant **HABIT** of it.

For prayer is part of our Christian **WORK**. Our assigned **TASK**.
It may be done profitably even if we do not find ourselves “in the mood.”

It’s the same with bodily exercise,
which is good for us even if we cannot always enjoy doing it.

Distance runner Karen Phelps knew that, so she
put this reminder of her door to reinforce her commitment to running:

RUN DAILY – EVEN IF YOU DON’T FEEL LIKE IT.

**RUN DAILY – EVEN IF YOU HAVE TO SKIP SOMETHING FUN
AND PEOPLE THINK YOU’RE WEIRD**

RUN DAILY – EVEN IN BAD WEATHER

RUN DAILY – EVEN WHEN YOU’RE HURTING AND WANT TO QUIT

Praying constantly, like running daily, doesn't come naturally.
It takes WORK!

GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES. Do we?

For most of us, it depends on the circumstances...
and isn't that just the problem?

What "comes naturally" for all of us is to live life
IN REACTION TO OUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

Years ago in England, a young man encountered some hard times.
He wrote in a letter to a respected former professor:
"I am quite bitter these days, which isn't surprising
under the circumstances"

The professor wrote back:
"Ah, but you are not **UNDER** the circumstances, are you?"

This morning, God asks us the same question
when He challenges us to rejoice, pray, and give thanks
in **ALL CIRCUMSTANCES**, even though it doesn't come naturally.

For unless we think these words are an exaggeration, we must
come to believe that the cause for our
**REJOICING/
PRAYING/
and GIVING THANKS**
lies somewhere else than in our circumstances.

The Good News today is that God has sent a helper
who meets us in any and all **CIRCUMSTANCES**.

Psalms 107 is a fascinating catalogue of our human "CIRCUMSTANCES", and how
God's help comes to each...

Some wandered in desert wastelands, hungry and thirsty.
God "led them to a city where they could settle."

Some sat in darkness...prisoners in chains.
The Psalmist says God "brought them out of darkness
and broke away their chains."

**Some went down to the sea in ships. There was a tempest
that lifted high the waves and made them reel and stagger like
drunken men**

The Psalmist says God **“stilled the storm to a whisper and...
guided them to their desired haven.”**

What are your circumstances? Are you
In the DESERT? In CHAINS and DARKNESS? In a frightful STORM?

Know this for certain:
to you has come a Savior!

He breaks chains, stills storms, and guides us to the heavenly city.
Meanwhile, says He, “I am with you always.”

Because of Him, you are no longer “under your circumstances” but now “under grace.”
Is there any time, any place
from which Christ is truly or finally ABSENT from you?

If the answer is NO,
then we may indeed “Give thanks in all circumstances”

Such living may not “come naturally,” but by His grace it DOES COME!

Let me tell you a true story.

Many years ago little girl was born in Alabama.
She could not see...or hear...or even speak!
Hers was a dark world, and she was a frightened creature!

Yet, as it turned out, she went on to live a full, rich, abundant life.
She graduated from Radcliff College with honors,
and she became an author.

Under the circumstances, how did that happen?
Just this way...that in addition to the circumstances, that little girl,
whose name was Helen Keller, had a faithful friend named Anne Sullivan
who became her teacher and her living link to the world.

And there is more.
After Anne had taught Helen about Jesus and His love, Helen
signed this thought with her hands:

“I always knew there was a God, but I never knew what to call Him!”

Ah, we know what to call Him!

We call Him the Savior. We call Him our Lord. We sing His sweet name – JESUS!

This morning, in all kinds of circumstances, we are gathered here.

Because of Jesus, God comes among us and says,

Rejoice always. Pray constantly. Give thanks in all circumstances.

He knows it doesn't come naturally,

that we will need a faithful friend, the kind of “miracle worker” that Helen Keller found in Anne Sullivan.

So he promises,

He who call s you is faithful, and he will do it.

He is doing so now, as you hear these words.

He is doing it when you come and kneel at the altar for the bread and wine.

He is doing so whenever another believer encourages you.

All to help you do what doesn't come naturally...

REJOICING. PRAYING. THANKING.

That which once seemed so impossible, so unnatural,

is now, quite clearly, the only way... because of Jesus!

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

