

Rev Tim Perkins  
July 8<sup>th</sup> 2021

***"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything but in every situation, by prayer and petition; with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 4: 4 – 7***

Dear Friends,

Many of you will know that I am a passionate Leicester City fan. It has been a remarkable few years for my club and another great season this year, winning the FA Cup for the first time in our history and finally tearing off the label of the team who had been to the most FA Cup Finals without having one. We had lost on four previous occasions! Leicester fans can identify more than most with any England fans like me, born after 1966, who have seen the national team reach the semi-finals of major tournaments on 3 previous occasions without having then progressed further. We are used to that sense of disappointment, but we also know well from our recent history that new chapters can be written and that sadness can be transformed into celebration.

Many Leicester fans will have shared my somewhat divided loyalties watching the semi-final against Denmark, given that the outstanding goalkeeper of the tournament plays for both Denmark and Leicester. And what a game Kasper Schmeichel had! I had said to Isaac before the game started that I hoped Kasper would have a great game and that England win. Then, while Harry Kane was waiting to take the decisive penalty, I said to Isaac, "I hope Kasper saves it but that we score the rebound!" I did not know I had the gift of prophecy until then!

It was a night of passion and ultimately celebration for all England football fans as we keep on dreaming with just one more game to go. The scenes of exuberance and joy both in the stadium, and up and down the country in pubs and fanzones were in stark contrast to the dark days of the pandemic!

It is amazing how, for many people, football stirs the soul in ways that little else does, we invest so much of ourselves in it. Maybe football is not your thing. Maybe for you it is another sport, or a different activity all together which makes you passionate and brings joy to your soul (or sadness when it does not work out how you hope.)

Let me ask you this (and I ask it of myself too!): are you as passionate about Jesus as you are about football (or whatever other interest you might put in its place)? Does your faith bring you the sort of joy that Paul describes in the words at the top of this letter? It seems to me that we will rejoice (or mourn) most over the things or people that are most important to us, the things or people that we treasure most. In Matthew 6: 21, Jesus says: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Do we prize earthly passions and activities more highly than we prize the joy of being in Christ, of being children of God?

When we are passionate about something, that passion just oozes out from every pore, we simply cannot keep it in! And yet somehow, I wonder if we have lost our passion for Jesus and the enthusiasm with which our love for him should flow quite naturally from us to others. If you have something to celebrate, I bet that you tell other people about it so that they can share

your joy and rejoice with you. Why does it so often seem then, that we are so reticent in sharing the joy we have found in Jesus?

Early on in his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes this: "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him...and so I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me...Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3: 7-14 abridged)

Paul is not saying that we should not be passionate about life in all its ups and downs. He is not saying that we should not enjoy hobbies or activities. He is saying that we should prize Jesus more than any of them. I wonder what ways you might find to do that?

And I hope that the England team will take St Paul's advice to heart and forget what is behind and strain towards what is ahead, and press on towards the goal to win the prize on Sunday evening!

Every blessing,

Rev Tim