

This morning, as we begin the Advent Season, we will explore one of the admonitions in Romans 12, *Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep*. This was written to the first century church in Rome, with Paul inviting the church to practice the ultimate in community. I share this this morning so that you can share this with your friends and neighbors. We know from experience that people are more spiritually open to God and Jesus at Christmas time and I hope you will share your take aways from this morning with some of those who are still living in darkness and have yet to experience the great light.

Weep with those who weep, Rejoice with those who rejoice

INTRODUCTION

Good Morning Mercy Hill Church, for those that don't know me, my name is Bob Durstenfeld and my wife Becky and I lead the global outreach team. Also, welcome to the Advent Season, as we look forward to celebrating the birth of our King and Savior, Jesus Christ.

One of Mercy Hill Church's core values is **Community**. This morning, I want to explore two aspects of community and share a bit of my life story. Let's also explore one aspect of what Jesus meant when He stated that we shall be known by our love. I want to discuss how we are all chosen to bring people into community and how this key value fails if we harbor jealousy or covetousness and are unwilling to step out of our comfort zone and into the Jesus Zone. I think that Community is a critical value at Mercy Hill and it is one of the reasons that Becky and I love being part of this Church Family. Community is also one way that we can show our heart and the heart of Jesus for the lost.

We need to recognize that community can be hard. And especially, that community can be messy. Community isn't always convenient, it might even demand that we give of ourselves in new ways. That is OK, pristine Christianity is NOT why Jesus died on the cross for us.

What do I mean by pristine Christianity, we are all liable to practice it. How do you respond when someone asks how you are doing? Do you reply, “oh, I’m just fine?” When in fact you are lonely, or sad or even angry. We need to learn to look at each other’s hearts, like Jesus does, and trust the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to what He sees. Life would be boring if all of us were all smiles all the time, life is not like that, it has bumps and warts and sometimes it smells bad, like a baby’s messy diaper. Community and Christianity should be open to the reality and the truth of the moment.

TRANSITION

Our launching point this morning is a verse that has echoed in my head since the first time I heard it more than 40 years ago. Romans 12:15. I want to read the entire chapter to help you have context. In the book of Romans, Chapter 12, the Apostle Paul is teaching the Church in Rome about how to live in community. How to live sacrificially, and counter culturally. How to live as one body.

When Paul wrote this, it was about 57AD and he was in the city of Corinth, he had finished his work in the east, and he planned to visit Rome on his way to Spain after first bringing a collection or love offering to the poor Christians in Jerusalem. The early church in Rome had a majority of Gentiles with a strong Jewish minority.

If you don’t have a Bible or scriptures on your phone, we have Bibles on the table in the back for you to use, and even take one home.

Please open your Bibles with me to the book of Romans, Chapter 12. **Romans** is in the New Testament, after the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and just after the next book, Acts. The verse I want to focus on this morning, **verse 15**, is about two thirds of the way through,

Read with me. Hopefully this chapter is familiar to many of you,

Romans 12:1-21 (ESV)

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual

worship.² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.⁹ Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

--NOW HERE IS VERSE 15...

¹⁵ **Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.**

¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

As we dive into God's Word this morning, Let's Pray...

Thank you Lord, for this morning and the opportunity to open Your word together and to glean from what is written that to apply what we have. Lord teach us all this morning as we ponder Your word. In Jesus bold name, AMEN.

Now, Nick or I could easily spend the next 21 weeks going through this chapter, verse by verse.

So, WHAT IS SACRIFICIAL LIVING? And how might that impact community? [Romans 12](#) offers an outline for breaking the world's mold. It is filled with directives to us as believers in Jesus. To put these directions in motion means going against the flow of society. Yet God does not hesitate to confront us with the choice. The option is not whether we will conform; rather, the choice is to **whom** we conform? Will our lives follow the pattern of this world or God's pattern? Here are five components for God's pattern, this is a summary of Chapter 12:

1. *Offer our bodies*— We need to deliver both our inner and outer self into God's control. For example, Divers and gymnasts know that where their head goes, the rest of their body will eventually follow.
2. *Be nonconformists*— We need to Consciously resist the suggestions and pressures of the world around us.
3. *Renew our minds*— We need to Constantly ask God to teach us to think as he thinks.
4. *Estimate ourselves honestly*— We need to have neither false humility nor inappropriate pride in our serving relationships with others.

And finally...

5. *Utilize our gifts*— We need to Identify those gifts that we have so that they are used in helping others; finding a purpose, a place, and a position to serve other believers.

I want to back track and focus on verse 15 this morning.

This is only 10 words; how can it be so hard? Well let's treat it like an onion and peel back a few layers.

Let me read verse 15 again:

¹⁵ **Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.**

One commentator says about this verse and Romans 12 in general that...:

One charge follows another without any apparent connection as Paul calls on his readers to share one another's joys and sorrows. It has often been noted that it is easier to fulfill the second half of this command than the first, because our natural inclination is to feel genuine sympathy for those in sorrow, but to share the joy of their rejoicing may present difficulty if the achievement or good fortune that prompts the joy is viewed with envy.

This has been my personal experience as well. We will dig further into this over the next few minutes.

We will look at the first half then the second half.

POINT #1

Let me start with a story from our family. Some of you know that Becky and I have two granddaughters that we love to dote on. A few months ago, we celebrated our granddaughter's third birthday and of course we had several gifts for her. Hannah has a six-year-old sister, Lucy, who can be a bit bossy and overbearing. We gave a gift to Hannah, the little one, and then big sister orders "*Let me show you how to open those*" and begins opening the little ones gifts. Hannah, not really knowing any better, says a quiet, "OK."

What happened here? Lucy was usurping Hannah's Joy, her moment of celebration.

Have you ever done that? Taken someone's moment of joy and deprived them of it?

With my granddaughters, I intervened. It was not ok for big sister to get to open little sister's gift. This was a teachable moment on self-control. Lucy

needed to let her sister enjoy the moment in the spotlight. Lucy needed to park her envy and covetousness, her sin nature and learn how to step into God's chosen pattern of Rejoicing with those who rejoice.

You may be thinking, "this is a child's problem, all kids go through this. But I contend that we as adults have the same problem, maybe not as outwardly as my granddaughter, but we all have moments of wanting what others have.

I know I have, fortunately, more in my long past youth than now.

Perhaps God anticipated this when early in the Bible, in the 10 commandments, God teaches DO NOT COVET. If we can let go of the coveting, not desire what others have, then we can begin to rejoice with one and other. I have been like my granddaughter, I have held envy or lust or any of a number of other sins that prevented me from helping someone else celebrate and rejoice in their moment. This is why this verse is personal to me, I have had to grow in my faith in order to be able to rejoice with others.

So, REJOICE, what does it mean to you? Think for a moment about the last time you experienced joy, I mean **PURE JOY**. Whether it was in a gift, like my granddaughter or an accomplishment for a job well done. This past summer, I experienced joy in being part of the team that went to Nicaragua. I had the opportunity to make balloon hats and animals for some kids that don't get loved on anywhere near enough. I helped a little girl with her homework project by sitting there and coaching her to the next step. It wasn't complicated, she needed to draw a picture of herself and one of her friends. She had a large poster board that she was afraid of messing up. I was able to help her by taking the project off the scary project board and moving it to two sheets of paper, which were easily replaceable if she was not happy with the results. When she had the two figures done, we glued them to the poster board and then rejoiced in a job well done.

Also in Nicaragua, I laughed with a staff that doesn't get to be appreciated often. We had two teams, and they each had to build the tallest structure using spaghetti noodles and marshmallows, you can imagine, the teams were madly racing the clock to construct what they thought would work. When it

came time to judge, there was a clear winning team, for just a few moments, as a strong wind came through and it came tumbling down. We all laughed. That brought me joy.

I rejoiced in the people who prayed for us and donated to make our trip and ministry in Nicaragua possible.

Where is your heart, do you want to share the moment? Have you wanted to perhaps shout or dance, perhaps like a quarter back in the endzone of a football game. Those moments are great, and God through the Apostle Paul calls on us to share them with others. But sometimes that can be really hard for the OTHER PERSON. I know, I have been there. Sometimes my response was out of selfishness, like when a friend got a new car, my heart response was “why can’t I have that.” Or when a coworker got a promotion and I didn’t. I had to STOP and let the Holy Spirit work in my heart, teach me to understand that it is God who is the giver of **all things** and he gives us gifts as He sees fit. We are not in charge and we can’t just pout, we have to learn to rejoice. Scripture calls us to set aside sin, lust, envy, covetousness and be in the moment of joy with one another. That setting aside, that is living in community, that is not conforming to the world but allowing God to transform us through His Son and teach us to be like Jesus.

The Bible gives us a negative example of rejoicing with the Prophet Jonah, here was a man of faith, a devout Jew, **Jonah son of Amittai** was from Gath-hepher, a town located on the border of the tribal areas of Naphtali and Zebulun. He ministered to the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II.

God called him to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyria, the great enemy of the Northern Kingdom. At the end of the story, after he calls the Assyrians of Nineveh to repent and they do, Jonah goes and throws a pity party and weeps bitterly, and God in His grace provides a plant for shade. Here is the end of the story from Jonah Chapter 4:

Jonah 4:1-11 (ESV)

¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² And he

prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³ Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

⁴ And the LORD said, “Do you do well to be angry?”

⁵ Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. ⁶ Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. [He rejoiced in God’s provision]

⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” ⁹ But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” ¹⁰ And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

We have a God of Grace, who wants to be in fellowship and relationship with us, and a God who cares for the lost, even the miserable Assyrians. Jonah had it wrong, he was focused on his interest, he was focused on the Jews being God’s chosen people and in his own selfishness, he had no interest in sharing his God with the Ninevites, never mind that it is God’s world and He created all of us. In God’s economy, Jonah’s jealousy had no place. In God’s economy, neither does ours.

I think that Paul was intentional in writing Romas, verse 15. He is speaking to us. He is calling us into a new order of community, to be in communion with Joy and the Joy of others. Why? Because God the Father rejoices in us. In our

salvation through Jesus, in the gifts that he give us, and in our daily turning to Him in reverence and prayer. God rejoices in our worship. That is why we were created.

Joy is not the same as happiness. What comes to my mind in comparing these two words is Disneyland, they use the tagline, “The happiest place on earth.” Why do they say that, because you can leave the cares of the world behind and for a few hours be child-like. It is momentary, eventually the park closes and you are forced back to your reality. Joy is not like that, it endures, it is deeper, it is character-shaping.

It can be easy for us to celebrate ourselves, but what about celebrating others? That is the community part that I opened with this morning. Jesus said, “enter into my Joy.”

In the Gospel of John, chapter 15, verse 10, Jesus says to His disciples,

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.

As we step into this Christmas season, whether at church, home, work, school, or in the community, we need to practice rejoicing with one another.

As Psalm 47 calls to us to

Clap your hands, all peoples!
Shout to God with loud songs of joy!
For the LORD, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth.
He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet.
He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves. Selah

Another great example for us from the New Testament is John the Baptist. Not only does he state that he is not worthy to tie Jesus’ sandals, but in John chapter 3:27 he goes a step further with a story;

John [the Baptist] replied, “No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. 28 You yourselves know how plainly I told you, ‘I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.’ 29 It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the bridegroom’s friend is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his [Jesus] success. 30 He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

Another example from Scripture is when Jesus and His family attend the wedding at Cana, In John Chapter 2, this is like John the Baptist in my previous example. Place yourself for a moment at this first century wedding feast. There is dancing, the DJ is playing everyone’s favorites, the food is top notch, everyone is having a great time, then oh no, they have run out of wine. But, mom comes to the rescue, sort of, she says, “Son, do your thing...Jesus hedged a bit, and says, “but my time isn’t yet.” But mom rules and in effect tells Jesus to rejoice with those who rejoice, and simply says to the servants, “do as He says,” we pick up the story in John Chapter 2, verse 6:

⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

We need to learn and lean in with the Holy Spirit and Rejoice with those who Rejoice.

POINT #2

Now, let pause and take a breath and take a look at the other half of verse 15.

Weep with those who weep.

When are **we** called to weep with **others**?

When they are humiliated, When they are angry, When they have suffered or when they have been humbled, When they are mourning loss.

I spent some time reading a book on sorrow and laments last year when my mother passed away. I found comfort in the fact that sorrow was on God's heart, enough that He chose to include much **on** sorrow in the Bible. I learned that laments are meant to allow us to have our outburst of tears, but in the end, we must lean in to God. I think that is why Paul calls us to weep with those who weep, so that we can remind those in distress that God is still in heaven, He still loves us and wants to have relationship with us.

Sometimes sorrow is a deeper emotion than joy, and not one that our culture likes us to express. But our Bible has a long history of encountering sorrow, here are a few examples.

The Old Testament book of Lamentations, this was written by the prophet Jeremiah after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. He wrote that he wept for many days upon the loss of God's temple, the city and most of all the people.

The book of Psalms has many laments, or poems about the sorrow of David over various circumstances.

And lament or sorrow are not just Old Testament issues, In the gospel of John, Chapter 11, we have the story of the death and resurrection of Lazarus, and then we have the shortest verse in the Bible, in John 11:35; "Jesus Wept." Why was Jesus weeping? He wept because His friend Mary was weeping over the loss of her brother. Jesus was practicing what Paul is teaching us in Romans 12, we need to learn to weep with those who weep. Even though Jesus know that He had power over death, nonetheless, He wept right along

with the mourners and with Mary and Martha. He showed compassion and love through His tears.

Just before this, Martha has an argument of sorts with Jesus, in John 11:21:

²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” ²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

We need to be like Martha and believe this too, that is what Christmas is all about, about Jesus coming down from Heaven and being born, so that He could be the Messiah, and save us from eternal death.

Last year, when my mother had a major stroke, I was able to go see her with my two sons who live in this area. Though I was not weeping outwardly, I was filled with sorrow and found great comfort in the company of my kids. I know that I found comfort in community when my mother died last year and people here at Mercy Hill acknowledged my sorrow. I know that several of you have lost parents, and that is hard, especially if you were close. But in our sorrow, our weeping hearts we have Jesus saying, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Jesus shows us the compassion in God’s heart. He invites us back into community.

Come along side those in anguish, even if it means saying nothing. Often, in those moments it is simply the reminder that we are human, and the other person recognizes our pain and provides the strength for us to move closer to God through the shared moment.

A bit later in the Gospel narrative, we find Peter weeping as well, but for a very different reason. He had just denied Jesus three times, and the rooster

crowed as Jesus had predicted. Peter's response in Mark 14:72 was to weep bitterly. There are times when we need to come along side others who have made dreadful mistakes. In Peter's case, it took a few days, but Jesus wants to bring Peter back to himself and a right relationship with God, to not live in bitterness and to accept the forgiveness of Jesus. Jesus does this so beautifully at the end of John's Gospel, when He invites Peter back into fellowship, but community with action, when Jesus says to Peter, "Feed my sheep."

In the book of Hebrews, chapter 13 verse 3 we read, "³Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body." In Christ we are one body of believers and when one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers. I have a personal example, a few months ago I was building a platform to raise our new stove to the same height as the counter. Well, I was making my last cut with the power saw and catching the off-cut with my right hand, I missed the off-cut and encountered the moving blade with my right index finger. SUDDENLY, I was aware, PAIN impacts the whole body, and then I had to suffer for a few weeks while the stitches healed. When one part of the church body suffers, the whole body is impacted. One person's pain or sorrow is the community's pain.

Paul in his letter to the Romans calls us to weep with those who weep.

In weeping with those who weep there is often reconciliation. Sometimes with another but more often with the Lord. My favorite example of this type of reconciliation in weeping is when King David is confronted by Nathan the Prophet about his misdeeds with Uriah and Bathsheba. I don't think that King David's response was, "Darn, I've be caught," but one of remorse and desire to be restored to the Lord. Though the account does not mention weeping, I feel that David in his remorse and desire for relationship with God was weeping in his soul. It is a way to say I'm sorry for the loss. This is Jeremiah's realization in Lamentations. He realizes that God is still in control and that he could still look forward to the coming of the Savior.

Even in his lament, the Prophet Jeremiah could also have hope. This is why weeping together is so important.

While we were in Nicaragua, one of our team had a family loss. This was hard. To be away from family at their time of need. But we were able to weep together, and I think that it strengthened our bond to one another as a team and as part of the body of Christ.

We serve a Great God of Comfort and He often sends others, our community, to weep with us in our moment of need.

So, how do we do this, rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep? Certainly, we cannot do this in our own strength, we have to realize the progression that Paul presents to the church in Rome. Romans 12 follows after Romans 11 which is all about God's grace that is gifted to us through Jesus. The is why I read the entire chapter of Romans 12 before focusing on Verse 15. The chapter starts with an appeal through the mercies of God. We all have to start there. With God, with His Son, with the power of the Holy Spirit. I shared examples of Jesus this morning, we must remember that he weeps with us, rejoices with us; our sorrow is His, our joy is His. He "loses" himself in our story.

CONCLUSION

In this season of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the coming of the Great King, we may also find ourselves in a season of sorrow, whether over memories, circumstances or situations. As the community of Mercy Hill, I invite you to ponder this verse, this command, to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

THAT IS CHRISTMAS! Jesus comes to us. He meets us in our good and hard. And leads us to true joy and life!

- Then, because we know he's caring for us, we can put ourselves on that altar and truly enter in and care for others.

We can rejoice in John 1,

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. **4** In him was life, and the life was the light of men. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

I hope this morning that as you ponder our verse, that you also consider that God rejoices and weeps with us. We should all be rejoicing that we have been reconciled to God through Jesus' birth, death and resurrection. We have a God who wants to be involved in our lives.

As we wrap up, I am going to ask you to do something bold. Turn to the person sitting next to you and ask them if they are willing to share where they are today. Are they rejoicing or weeping or both. It is ok, if this makes you feel uncomfortable to simply say, "I pass." Take a moment to console and comfort those who are weeping or rejoice with those who are filled with joy. I will call us to prayer in a few moments,

Let's Pray.

Lord, we thank you for this Advent season, this season of Great Light, where we celebrate peace, joy and hope and anticipation of your return. Help us to re-read Romans 12 this week and let it speak to us, call out to us, how we might better live in community, in family and in faith, not just this Christmas season, but until you return. AMEN.

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