Tracey Tidd:

I remember singing the Sunday school chorus, I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart, deep down in my heart to stay. And maybe you remember that chorus as well this morning. To be honest, in these last five months, some days I've had to do some deep digging to bring that joy up from deep down in my heart to my day-to-day reality in this COVID-19 journey. Scripture makes it very clear that in spite of anything happening around us, including all the effects of COVID-19, that we can have joy. Jesus told his disciples in John chapter 15, "If you obey my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

 You see, Paul wrote a letter from prison to the church at Philippi, and he spoke 14 times in four short chapters about joy and rejoicing. How is that possible? How is it that Paul, in prison as a result of following Jesus and being faithful to what God had asked him to do, can speak about an experience of joy? Today I want us to see how Paul lived with joy in that journey, even when the journey took a turn that might have not been expected, even when he found himself in a lockdown.

 Paul wrote this letter encouraging people to choose joy regardless of circumstances. From his prison he shows us that we can choose joy for the journey when we live with the right perspective. You see, Paul sees two things were happening because of his imprisonment. As we read in the passage, starting at verse 13, from the Message, "All the soldiers here and everyone else, too, found out that I am in jail because of this Messiah." Well, that piqued their curiosity and now they have learnt all about him.

 Paul is telling us that because he is in prison, people are hearing all about Jesus that might not have heard about him otherwise. Paul has a perspective on what is happening that allows him to maintain his joy. Paul has also seen what is happening for other believers because of his imprisonment. In verse 14, from the Message, Paul says these words, "Most of the followers of Jesus here have become far more sure of themselves in the faith than ever, speaking out fearlessly about God and about the Messiah." You see, Paul was seeing that not only were more people learning about Jesus because he was with them in prison, but believers were becoming more confident and growing in their faith in Jesus Christ.

 And you see, Paul was able to continue to rejoice because he had a perspective to live with that saw God at work. Very familiar passage, Romans eight and 28, tells us that Paul's perspective was he lived knowing that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and who have been called according to his purpose. Paul knew that behind every problem we face, God has a purpose that is bigger than the problem. Romans 8:29 reminds us that the purpose God has is that we would be his child and that we would be conformed to the likeness of his son, Jesus Christ.

 Today, many of us are facing problems that we never would have expected, but God knew what we would be facing. And he is prepared to use the problem you are facing and work all things for good, accomplishing his purpose for you. His plan for you is to be his child and to grow in your faith and your relationship with him and to become more like Jesus. I invite you to join with me in choosing to rejoice. We can, as we live with that perspective, that God is bigger than the problems that we face today. Watch for what God is doing around you and within you. And may you know the joy in the journey of today and the days that lie ahead. May God bless you and may you have a great week.