

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Sermon Title: Selfie Christianity
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe
Scripture: Philippians 4:4

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!

On Thursday night, at our weekly Bible Study we looked at the verse, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say Rejoice!" That was St. Paul writing to a Church full of grumpy people trying to help them get out of their bad mood. So he tells them to pray, and rejoice. "Rejoice always," he shouts, and for emphasis, "again I say, rejoice!"

Our Confirmation class has no trouble with that verse. They are a joyful, rambunctious, joyful, lively, joyful, fun, funny, animated, and, "again I say," joyful bunch of youthful human beings. They are also very much of today's world.

Here they are today, sitting in this 300-year-old Church, joining a 2,000-year-old religion based on Scriptures that are 3,000 and 4,000 and 5,000 years old, taking part in a Protestantism that has its 500th anniversary next year, following a Jesus who walked the dusty desert roads of the ancient Middle East. At the same time, our young people are hip, cool, smart, involved, thoughtful, provocative, busy.

They are also tied into technology; they are immersed in social media. Their world is faster, bolder, complex, interconnected in a dazzling way. They sit, chat, text, work on their iPhone and listen all at the same time.

On Friday, I was sitting in my coffee house in New Haven working on this sermon, with two Yale students sitting next to me. One boy was on his computer with headphones in his ears, and he's pounding away on his keyboard while, *while* talking to his friend who was on *his* iPhone checking messages, texting, e-mailing, *while*, talking back to his friend, neither one

missing a beat, both seemingly paying no attention to each other, yet completely attuned to the other! It drives me crazy. It drives all adults crazy. They may even do it to drive us crazy. But it's their world. Sometimes we embrace it. Sometimes we don't.

Last Monday night we had our closing Confirmation Class, a sit-down dinner, a sort of mini-retreat; but we began out in the Memorial Garden, gathered around the Cross, where I gave them a sort of very grandfatherly, wise old man, somber speech. But . . . before I began, I told the kids to put away their cellphones, or I would eat them. "You'll eat our cellphones?" "Yes." They believed me. They knew I would. So they are going to be very surprised right now!

I want everybody here, everybody, young, old, in between, little kids, Confirmation Class, grandparents, Alida, everybody, I want you all to take out your cellphone, iPhone, iPad, your laptop—heck, your whole computer if you've got it—hold it up . . . and take a picture. Of you. In Church. You, your family, your whole pew, the pew behind you, take a picture of you in Church.

In fact, to their amazement, this is my challenge to our whole Confirmation Class. For the next four years, I want you to selfie your Church life! You realize that in four years you're going to be gone from here. Four years from now, early May 2020, you'll be getting ready for senior prom, high school graduation. College will be just around the corner, and life will change forever for you, for your families, for us. You'll be going, heading off into the world. For most of you, you'll never be back here again except as a visitor. But for those next four years, we will still have you. And I want you to document them with a million selfies.

You, at Church. You, up here as a Junior Deacon. You, at SPF. You, feeding the hungry at St. George's Soup Kitchen. You, helping the poor in Appalachia. You, going to India with Alida. You, helping with the Dogwood Festival. You, helping kids at Sunday School. You and your Church. You and God. You and us.

Alida and I just got back from Italy—Florence. What an amazing time! So much history, beauty, art, religion, Chianti, pasta, and more art. We spent one day at one of the world's greatest art museums. Paintings and sculptures by Michelangelo, Raphael, Donatello, Botticelli, the best of the best.

There was this man who was really strange. Here he is among one of the world's greatest art collections, and he's rushing by everybody, pushing his

way in, elbowing folks so he can get close to a painting or a sculpture, But not to look at it!

He doesn't look at anything. That's my point. He just sticks his cellphone in the air, snaps a picture—not a selfie, not him and the art—just the art. He doesn't even look at it, really, just points, snaps, shoves another old lady aside, does it again, over and over again. Every great painting, every great sculpture, never looks at it, never sees anything, never feels anything.

I don't want you to go through life like that. Life isn't a race, a chase, or a checklist. No, God gives you this life to live, to experience. And for these next four years, I want you to live our Church, experience it, feel it, and document it, selfie it, and then hit send. Let your world know that you are proud of your Church life, your faith, and yourself. That can be a great combination.

And now, let's stand and sing together Hymn No. 608, "I Would Be True."

*I would be true, for there are those who trust me;
I would be pure, for there are those who care;
I would be strong, for there is much to suffer;
I would be brave, for there is much to dare;
I would be brave, for there is much to dare.*

*I would be friend of all—the foe, the friendless;
I would be giving, and forget the gift;
I would be humble, for I know my weakness;
I would look up, and laugh, and love, and lift;
I would look up, and laugh, and love, and lift.*