

Trinity UMC Iron Mountain

July 10, 2022

Pastor Geri Hamlen

Message 'Calling to God with Joy: An Invitation'

Psalm 100 and Colossians 1:1 - 14

Paul's letter to the Colossians has echoes of Psalm 100 which we read at the beginning of our time together.

Being the people of God. **We are the Lord's; we are the people of God,**

The glorious power of God. For the Lord is good;

God's steadfast love endures for ever;

God's faithfulness to all generations.

Joyfully giving thanks to God. Enter God's gates with thanksgiving,

and God's courts with praise!

Give thanks and bless God's name!

It doesn't seem to matter how many centuries go by, or how many translations of the Bible there are, or how many denominational and political conflicts arise: these 3 things just keep coming up as reliable, trustworthy and true:

We are the people of God and God's power is glorious and no matter what happens, there is always a time and a place and a space to joyfully give thanks to God.

I mentioned last week that I will be using the Psalms during July to remind us of some of the lyrics to God's favorite playbook. That's what the book of Psalms is...songs of God that were sung during worship in the Temple.

Ambrose, a fourth-century Bishop in Milan Italy, wrote: "Yes, a psalm is a blessing on the lips of the people, a hymn in praise of God, the assembly's homage, a general acclamation, a word that speaks for all, the voice of the church, a confession of faith in song. It is the voice of complete assent, the joy of freedom, a cry of happiness, the echo of gladness."ⁱ

Do you hear what he is saying? He's talking about Psalms as expressions of Joy, happiness, gladness. He may well have been thinking of the same Psalm 100 we are reading today.

Now those of you who were here last week might remember me talking about Psalm 77 being a cry for help. That's a Psalm of questions about God's presence in times of trouble. True confessions: There were 6 questions, not 5 in the part of Psalm 77 we read last week. I give thanks to the one who pointed out my error in that.

So Psalm 77 is not so much about joy and happiness and gladness, right? In truth, there are different categories of Psalms that we will consider this month.

Just as Psalm 77 is **an invitation to question God** about the troubles in our lives and in our world, so is Psalm 100 (and quite a few others like it) an **invitation to Joy**.

An invitation to acknowledge the joy and happiness and gladness that are here in this world in spite of the troubles that co-exist with them.

Make a joyful noise...that's an invitation!
Serve the Lord with gladness...that's an invitation!
Give thanks and bless God's name...that's an invitation!

God has been inviting us into the joy of creation since the dawn of time...when after 6 long days of creative output, God sat back to rest, looked around and said...This is good. This world, the heavens, the plants and animals and yes, especially, these humans who I have created in my image so that they too may experience the joy and happiness and gladness that I am enjoying right now.

These invitations to joy are sprinkled throughout the Psalms and the Scriptures and in the life of the church to..when someone invites you to worship or to a picnic or to sing in the choir or to serve on a committee. It might sound like work, but there is joy when the people of God come together and share their peace and hope and joy.

You don't have to accept the invitation of course. You can choose to live in a darker mood of cynicism and despair.

But the door is always open to joy, happiness and gladness for all of us, for each of us, for the whole world for that matter.

It's just that sometimes we do need a very specific invitation to joy, right? Because we forget. And we get stuck on the underside of life.

I read a devotion this week...it's so amazing how I choose the Sermon scriptures and topics and then God leads me to these examples!

I spent this past weekend in western North Carolina celebrating a friend's wedding. It was in a beautiful garden where we were surrounded by hydrangeas, roses, and lush grapevines. After the bride walked down the grassy center aisle, the priest began the ceremony in a most unexpected way. Saying....

"These are difficult and painful times." He looked out over the congregation, acknowledging that many of us might feel awkward given the crises, challenges, and fears of these days. I certainly felt guilty about it, wondering how I might enjoy a wedding with so much bad news in the world. "And yet," he said, "God blesses the love that has brought this couple here. No matter what, God still calls us to delight. There was an audible release of breath. My tight chest released. He freed us to joy."

He freed them for joy. He invited them to remember that joy can co-exist with trouble with room left over for delight and happiness. Joy may feel like it's in short supply sometimes but God is forever finding ways to invite us into joy. Because gladness and happiness and joy never disappear completely for the church and the communities of faith who keep hope alive and stay unified by the love of God in the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ.

And there it is...we're back to the Holy Spirit, aren't we? Joy is the calling card of delight that the Holy Spirit delivers over and over again. Those of you who are reading Proverbs...a chapter a day...will have read this week about Woman Wisdom, Chapter 8...this was part of our worship a few weeks ago too. Ann Stewart, a Princeton Seminary student writes:

"The image of woman Wisdom reminds us that we too are divinely created for community, designed to delight in our Creator with joy and wonder. In an age when our communities are often fractious and fraying at the seams, Wisdom's call prompts us to heal the divisions in our own communities and to do so with a deep and abiding joy, delighting in the world and the people that God created."ⁱⁱⁱ

We are still in the season of Pentecost when we give the Holy Spirit our time and attention and thanks. Do you remember how Jesus said to his disciples, on the night when he was betrayed [John 14:26](#) ... the **Advocate**, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.

Part of the 'everything' that Jesus wants us to learn is how to be joyful.

To be joyful in giving thanks to God, yes.

Also to be joyful even when life is hard.

The day of Pentecost itself, in Acts 2, shows us how powerful and amazing God is.

Powerful and amazing enough to make joy available to us all.

Do you remember how Pentecost went...Acts 2: NRSV

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **I talked about the Breath of God a few weeks ago, remember, the *ruach*, as an image of the Holy Spirit.**

CEV ³ They saw something like flames of fire (sometimes translated as divided tongues, as of fire) that were separated and stood over each person there. ⁴ They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak different languages^[a] by the power the Holy Spirit was giving them.

The Holy Spirit filled them, brought them power, gave them words to express their experience of Jesus and to be understood. Yes, flames, like breath are a symbol, a reminder of what Jesus taught us and what joy Jesus wants for us through the Holy Spirit.

Flames because fire has energy. Joy in that.

Flames that bring warmth in the coolness of early morning camping. Joy in that.

Flames that bring light, into the darkness of night, death, ignorance. Joy in that.

Flames that remind us of the fiery sun and the twinkling burning stars. Joy in that.

Flames that burn to ashes that which is no longer needed in order to make room for the new life.

Yes, flames can bring trouble too, when left untended and used for destructive purposes but the Holy Spirit flame is God's light and comfort and energy and joy to the world. No wonder we sang that song on Pentecost Sunday when Joyce was preaching. We need to be reminded that Joy is God's gift to us...in all the circumstances and seasons of our lives.

Bonfires...3 different people I know told me about bonfires this past week that they had at their homes or at a picnic or campground. I know that you folks have your own experiences of sitting around a fire and from now on, I invite you to watch those flames as they crackle and flicker and send sparks into the darkness....and remember the joy of the Pentecost flames. And you may not want to make a joyful noise in front of your friends and family as you see the Holy Spirit in your fire, but you can breathe in and breathe out and say a quiet prayer of thanksgiving, can't you?

I ran across a Celtic blessing this week by Alexander Carmichael.^{iv}

Blessing of the Kindling by Alexander Carmichael

I will kindle my fire this morning

In presence of the holy angels of heaven...

Without malice, without jealousy, without envy,
Without fear, without terror of any one under the sun,
With but the Holy Son of God to shield me.

God, kindle Thou in my heart within
A flame of love to my neighbor,
To my foe, to my friend, to my kindred all...To
From the lowliest thing that liveth,
To the Name that is highest of all.

My prayer and hope for this season of Pentecost is that you will see and feel and experience the Holy Spirit...not just here on Sunday mornings. Not just in the barrage of words that I pour out each week. Not just in the prayers and songs we say and sing...but also in the breezes and winds of summer.

Let there be joy in their soft touch and mighty power.
In the flowers.

Let there be joy in their blooming and their dying.

In the flicker and flames of campfires,

Let there be joy in their warmth and comfort and sparkling, crackling flashes of light.

Let us pray:

Stir up in us, O God, the gift of your Holy Spirit. May we accept the invitation to receive your Holy spirit of wisdom and understanding, to receive your wonderful spirit of counsel and might, to receive your ever-changing spirit of knowledge, and most especially, to receive **the spirit of joy and thankfulness in your presence**, both now and forever.' Amen. Isaiah 11:2 - 3

ⁱ Claiborne, Shane et al. *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*, Zondervan, Nashville, 2010, p. 290, May 24.

ⁱⁱ <https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/summer-wisdom-proverbs-thread/comments#comment-7621489>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/summer-wisdom-proverbs-thread/comments#comment-7621489>

^{iv} Bass, Diana Butler, *Freeing Jesus*, HarperOne, New York City, NY, 2021, p. 87