

Our Savior Lutheran Church
Sermon – Tim Leitner, SAM
June 14, 2020
Second Sunday after Pentecost

+Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

I'm sure it is not a good sign to start a sermon with an apology but I feel the need to do just that. For this message I concentrated on today's reading from Romans and Psalm 100. I apologize because I ended up jumping back and forth between them throughout this message. So, it is my hope it makes sense.

Psalm 100 opens with the verse: ***1Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.*** I have to admit it has been difficult to make a joyful noise the last several months. With our world experiencing so much death and sickness due to COVID-19, with the stress of joblessness and no income causing anger and hardship for so many people, with the toll on people's mental health from the confinement, distancing, and changes we all have made in our life needed to avoid further sickness - all that adds up to challenge this psalm's suggestion to make a joyful noise.

Our church council and worship & music committee have begun investigating what it will take to safely return to worshipping together. Everything that needs to be considered can quickly become overwhelming. Our bishop has sent out a nine-page document with suggestions and considerations before worshipping together. Now the ELCA has released a 32-page document containing guidance on resuming worship. We are reviewing guidance from the CDC and the health department; there is so much literature to read and ponder. The outcome of all this reading is uncertain at this point. The worship & music committee and church council discussions will be on-going but it is safe to say we cannot pick up our normal worship practices where we left off in early March. That is a sad reality, adding to the resistance to make a joyful noise.

And if that were not enough, people all over the country and the world have begun to stand up in demonstrations and protests, wanting to bring about change, changing the unjust treatment of too many people based on the color of their skin. Our church leaders have stood up and voiced the need for us to shine a light on this injustice and inequity, encouraging us to work on bringing about these changes that will ensure justice and equity for those who suffer from prejudice. These changes are long overdue, but the journey to bring about all the needed change will be long and stressful for all people of our country and the world. Sadly, there are many struggles against injustice and oppression throughout our world. So much change needs to take place. There are many who resist the need for change and others who want to rush to quickly resolve the injustice. Sadly, these are not problems with quick or easy fixes. All which compounded my feeling that now is not the time to make joyful noise.

By now you can tell I started off my sermon preparation this week in a very negative mood. All the stress-filled events going on in the world effected my initial feelings as I pondered today's readings. It took me some internal battling and self-reflection to realize I was connecting my ability to make a joyful noise with living in a world without suffering. My view tied making a joyful noise with living in a world where everything is going well. Thinking a world with abundant happiness would lead

us to make a joyful noise. Because how can there be a joyful noise of praise when there is so much suffering in the world.

Then reading the Romans text, I saw how mistaken I was. Nothing could be further from the truth, for Paul states: ***we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance/perseverance/patience, and endurance produces a proven character, and that character produces hope, a hope that does not disappoint us.*** Suffering is not the end point but a catalyst for change and growth within us. Suffering does not cause us to produce a joyful noise but turning to God in this time of great suffering changes our reaction and experience of suffering. It moves us from being stuck in negativity due to such suffering, causing us to grow with endurance and perseverance, giving us resolve and strengthening us to have hope. Giving us the hope that only God can provide. The evidence of the source of that hope is what we hear later in Romans, after: ***hope does not disappoint us, - it is because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit that has been given to us by God.***

With that hope explained by Paul in the Romans text, it was important to return to Psalm 100. Rereading that psalm, I realized that the joy this psalmist calls us to express isn't tied to our level of comfort. It is not how peaceful and prosperous the world may be, because depending only on earthly comfort for our source of joy, basing joy only on our personal health and wealth is misguided and leads to an empty joy. That is not the joy the author writes of in Psalm 100.

Reading further in that Psalm, I realized it was my selfishness that blocked the joy that we are to express in praising God. Such joy came from reading: ***³Know that the LORD is God. It is He that made us, and we are His; we are His people. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. For the LORD is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness is to all generations.***

We are all God's creation, all of us, all people! God has not only given us this earth and all that is in it but He has given us each other. As varied and different as we all are, we are God's creation. And it is God's intention that we live together, love one another, support and care for each other, not only in good times but in these times of suffering. Suffering in sickness, suffering of hunger and need, suffering from injustice and oppression, suffering from restrictions and major changes in life. Rather than focusing on points that bring further differences and divides us, now, in this time of suffering, it is God's intention for us to Love one another. God made us unique, He gave us this glorious diversity that we see throughout the world. He gave us these differences as a gift for us all, as challenging as that may seem.

Too frequently in this world we have seen diversity, sickness, economic status cause divide rather than unification. Jumping back to the Romans, we boast/rejoice in our suffering because in the end that suffering leads to hope. Not hope in ourselves and in our abilities but hope in God. Hope that shines the light on God's promise, hope that leads us back into life, knowing this earthly life is not the end for us. Hope of knowing that we have God's strength behind us to step up and express our love for each other.

Knowing that, helps us to act as the children of God, but we also know we are not perfect in our actions. We falter, we become overwhelmed and exhausted, we fall back into wanting our comfort and seclusion from the world's sufferings, distancing ourselves from others problems because that is easier and safer. That's our sin, our imperfection in carrying out God's intended life that we are to live, performing the work that God gives us to do in this world.

God knows our weakness; God knows our imperfections and God still loves us all. Loving us so much that God has provided forgiveness for our sins of division, neglect, indifference, anger, hate and selfishness. Paul reinforces this in the last verse from the Romans text: ***God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*** Jesus became truly human, He lived His life healing and teaching, then He suffered and died on the cross for our sins, fully knowing we will never be perfect but giving us God's love that strengthens us to continue our efforts to do God's work. Giving us the guidance to live our lives as God intended, loving one another, standing up for one another, caring for one another, setting aside politics and race and all that makes us different, in order to show the love Jesus has shown for us.

Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension is the fulfillment of God's promise to us. And with that promise fulfilled, with the hope God provides in the midst of our suffering, and with the love God gives us to share with all others, we make a joyful noise to the Lord our God!

Amen.