

I Come with Joy
Philippians 4:4-9 July 7, 2019
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Today we continue our *Composing a Faith* sermon series. We've been inspired by the stories behind some of the most influential hymns and hymn writers and how our music helps us connect with the scriptures in a memorable and heartfelt way.

Someone who is still alive, Brian Wren, wrote this morning's featured hymn. He's a prolific hymn writer and what I like is much of his subject matter comes from worship in regular churches like ours. *I Come with Joy*, was written for his home congregation as a summation of sermon series his wife preached on communion.

The hymn gives us new ways of seeing things because joy isn't the emotion we first associate with the sacrament. We recall the night in the upper room as told by the gospels--the night in which Jesus was betrayed. The mood is dark and foreboding. The words of institution contain all those heavy words: betrayal, broken, blood, sin. So, the mood of communion is usually not "joyful" but more solemn. Sometimes it can be overdone and feel like a morose funeral for Jesus—whose death you seem to be personally responsible for--without even a hint that the result of that the story does not end in sadness and darkness but rather with "Good News."

Wren challenges us to not get so caught up in the memorial that we forget to celebrate what all of it means. Our story doesn't end with the death of Jesus but in the new life that is available to all of us through Jesus. We are Easter people and he wrote a hymn to suggest that even our communion services should point to this most fundamental reality of our faith.

The earliest Christians and many denominations call communion the Eucharist, which in Greek means Good Thanksgiving. You can't give thanks without some element of joy. Traditions that have priests define the most important aspect of priesthood as celebrating mass.

Wren's hymn zeroes in on themes like what is the result of Jesus' sacrifice? How does this act of receiving communion shape us and how does it inform our interactions with others?

The first stanza reminds us that we can come to the table with joy because it is a reminder that we are forgiven, loved and free. The idea isn't that communion leaves us guilt and shame, feeling horrible about what Jesus went through because of our sinfulness. Rather the point is that in communion we taste, we eat, we drink symbols of our forgiveness and redemption. God's grace is even more powerful than our sin. What can be more joyful than that? In that moment you have a physical sign that says you belong to God. To know that you are cared for, watched over, guided. God's own spirit resides in you. Rejoice! You are forgiven, loved, free--free from the shame and guilt that binds you.

We can be freed for joy because we have a reminder that God provides for us and will be with us no matter what. The Last Supper happened during a Passover meal. Maybe some of you have been to a Seder meal in the Jewish tradition. During the meal food is eaten symbolically to

remember the story of how God liberated the Jewish people from slavery to the Egyptians. Every item is deeply symbolic.

One symbol is bread that recalls how God provided manna, bread in the wilderness when it looked like the people would starve to death. Jesus takes that bread and says—this is my body. One thing he's saying is that it's enough. God's got you. There is enough. You are enough. God provides. You don't have to feel inadequate.

It is such a hard message to internalize because we feel like there is never enough. If we start with ourselves, instead of our source, we always wind up feeling inadequate. There is never enough.

- How much sleep did you get? Not enough.
- How much time do you spend on the things that are most important to you? Not enough.
- What are you doing to make the world a better place? Not enough.
- How much money do you make? Not enough. A kid asked his dad, "Is \$56,00 a lot of money?" His dad answered, "It is--until you make it. Then it doesn't seem that much at all, you feel you need more."

Every ad we see tells us we are not enough. You need this. You aren't complete until you get that. We are under siege by this. Everywhere you look there is an ad, or some post that makes someone else's life look so perfect. The message is drilled into us until it is internalized on a cellular level: we are not enough. We are not good enough. We are not talented enough. We are not worthy of affection, admiration, and love. So, we just consume and chase after any program or snake oil salesman who promises to fill the gap.

But in communion you have this tangible symbol that says otherwise. We feast at the table of the one who took the 2 loaves and 5 fish that didn't seem like enough to feed 5,000 but he blessed and broke it and made it enough. Our source is more than enough.

He's more **than enough** to cover every need, all my failures. If start with myself all I see is scarcity. I feel incomplete. If instead, I start with the source instead of myself, my perspective shifts. Jesus says my spirit is within you. God's self is within. There is more than enough.

If you get that into your heart at a cellular level, you'll develop a new mindset. Every failure brought up will trigger new loop that grace is greater than my failure. Accept what God says about you and reject everything else and live in glory.

Brian Wren's song reminds us that communion is this little breakthrough of God's kingdom on earth. Everyone has enough. No one is excluded. No one is considered a better person than another. It is about sharing. Looking out after one another. What could be more joyful than this practice in a world where exclusion and judgmentalism and division are the order of the day? We participate in something so different, so needed.

Communion points us toward the world that God is calling is toward where we are not divided, where there isn't a hierarchy, but we share and look out for each other.

Communion reminds us of our oneness with the Spirit, with God. It is the stuff that can help us get through hard and anxious times.

In fact I thought about our scripture lesson the other night during the earthquake. We are renting a condo in one of the high-rises downtown. It's built on those rollers so it really moves—as it's designed to. But it's really quite unnerving. Dayna was freaking out. And I kept going over the verse.

Rejoice in the Lord, always, again I say rejoice. Have no anxiety about anything about anything but....

Um, yeah? It feels like I'm about to lose it here, Lord.

There's a difference between joy and happiness. Happiness is more circumstantial. Little hits of things that bring us good feelings. But joy is a whole tone deeper. It's a disposition of the spirit no matter what is going on at any moment. It's a satisfaction, a peace that comes from trusting in something larger than yourself. The peace our scripture says, "surpasses all understanding."

Yes there are moments when you are sad and terrified and worried. But if you calm down you can find that joy underneath all of that. Paul, who wrote all of this wrote it from prison. He is someone who had suffered: physically they scourged him, beat him, tried to stone him to death. He suffered through people disrespecting and shaming him. And yet he said "rejoice always."

The key is in what the scripture says. Give thanks in all circumstances, letting your requests be known to God. If you want to rejoice—build a prayer life where you give thanks in all things. Not *for* all things. But in the midst of even bad stuff, you still are able to find things to be grateful for. To have trust that God will be with you and help you learn and grow from every experience.

Having a deep sense of gratitude helps give perspective. It is a key indicator of the sense of joy people really have. It is not that gratitude produces joy it is that we are joyful because we have so much we are grateful for.

I love people who have taken the 30 days of gratitude challenge. They are always so good to be around. One person in our church has taken it on for the whole year and posts his gratitudes on Facebook. I don't often go to FB but when I do, I like seeing his posts. Often I think, "Yeah, I'm grateful for that, too. Thanks, God." Even a vicarious gratitude jolt goes a long way in sustaining the peace and the joy that is inside.

So we celebrate communion. The great thanksgiving. The great reminder that there is much to be joyful for. We are in the hands of a good and loving God who has placed all we need within us to be joyful. Let us come with joy. Amen.