

Joy to the World!

Acts 2.1-21

May 23, 2010

“Sheer joy is God’s, and this demands companionship.”

- Thomas Aquinas

“Joy is not in things, it is in us.”

- Richard Wagner

The Reading

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?’ ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ ¹³But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’ ¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. ²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

If you are glancing at my sermon title in the bulletin, I know exactly what you’re thinking. What in the world is he doing naming a sermon “Joy to the World!” I mean, this is May 23rd for goodness sake ...it’s Pentecost. Of course, the first thing that comes to mind after

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reading this title is Christmas... (Mormon Tabernacle Choir sings *Joy to the World* over the sound system, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king...") Get them out of here... no, it's not Christmas; but my sermon is still called Joy to the World... and appropriately so.

Again, some of us, those middle aged or beyond, might think back to the '60's and the Three Dog Night hit called, you guessed it, Joy to the World... (Three Dog Night sings *Joy to the World* over the sound system, "Jeremiah was a bullfrog, he was a good friend of mine...") stop the music! I didn't like Three Dog Night the first time around, and I am not about to encourage a revival. No, it's not Christmas, and this is not a reunion tour of Three Dog Night; nevertheless, it is appropriate that I call my sermon Joy to the World because joy is not limited to the Christmas season. Nor is joy limited to an aging rock band from the '60's. Joy is ours daily, joy is ours because all things begin in joy; from the universe as a whole to your life in particular, all things spring forth from sheer joy, divine joy, creative joy... God's incomparable and boundless joy.

It was Thomas Aquinas who observed that "Sheer joy is God's, and this demands companionship." Think about it; this is a mouthful. Sheer joy is God's, and this demands companionship. In that proverbial *Once upon a time*, in other words, God possessed more joy than any one body could contain, even a divine one body. God possessed so much joy that something or someone was needed to share it with... so God created a universe. This is why God could look around while creating the universe and say, "Oh, this is good, this is really good."

Joy has always motivated God's creative activity; joy is the reality in which we were conceived and created; and joy is the reality that sustains us day by day by day. We can sing joy to the world today because this joy will never be taken from us. It will never be effaced or erased. It will never be stripped away or ripped from our lives, because it is intimately woven into our spirit; it is stamped indelibly on our heart. It may be muted for a time when you are called upon to walk through one of life's dark valleys. It may be muted for a time when you have lost a loved one or a job, and your life seems to be falling apart. But despite any and all evidence to the contrary, life began in joy and to joy it will return.

This is why we can no longer completely agree with the Old Testament assertion that we are born of dust. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return," Genesis says of all humankind (3.19). We understand this assertion best on Ash Wednesday when we affirm our mortality; or during Lent when we turn to God as our only hope of enduring, abundant life. But we can no longer agree, those of us who walk in the shadow of the Galilean cannot accept this as a statement of our ultimate purpose, of our origin and destiny. No; those of us who see God through the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth and live by God's Spirit cannot agree that we come from and will return to... dust. Our affirmation of faith, the truth that we celebrate on this day of beginnings, on this day of Pentecost, on this day when we celebrate the 60th anniversary of Overland Park Christian Church, is this; we come from joy, and to joy we shall return. Joy to the world!