

## Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Sep 10th 2017

Why are some people so joyful? And why is it so important that we go to church to express our joy? The Psalm today calls us to “sing joyfully to the Lord.” And at the same time, it warns us against hardening our hearts toward God. That is the challenge, I think, for all of us. Our hard heartedness keeps us from joyfulness. It is evident in many ways. One is in our unwillingness to turn from our wicked ways. Another is in our inability to love others. But mostly, it is in our inability to love ourselves – to be joyful! The good news of the message of reconciliation is Christ living in and among us so that we can more easily over-come our hard-heartedness and be joyful! Through Christ, we can be more loving, we can be more forgiving, we can be more joyful! One very basic way we can express God’s love for us is to be joyful!

So, let’s return to the Psalm for today and meditate on it. If we really accept that the Lord is the rock of our salvation, we can come into his presence with thanksgiving. Yes, we can be joyful! If we really accept that we are the people the Lord guides, we can be grateful. Yes, we can be joyful! Joy in the presence of God is quite different, I think, from happiness as this world defines it. It is much deeper. It is not just about our emotions, it is about our souls. A joyful person is not a happy Pollyanna who never faces adversity or engages in wickedness. A joyful person is someone who does not refuse to turn away from wickedness when the Lord speaks. Joyful people do not harden their hearts to God. Joyful people are open-hearted redeemed sinners who are grateful.

So today is Sunday and that is what I think about when I gather in church each Sunday morning. We don’t sing our opening hymn until after we confess our wickedness and receive absolution. We open our hearts to hear that good news, and then we can sing joyfully to the Lord as we come into his presence with thanksgiving. In joy, we bow down in worship and kneel before the Lord, for he is our God and we are the people he shepherds and guides. In joy, for our salvation, we come into the Lord’s presence to hear his voice. Let us pray together then, that we will not harden our hearts, but that we will come into God’s presence singing joyfully!

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