

Sermon Philippians 4:4-13 18th Sunday after Pentecost Series A

Sermon: 18th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Philippians 4:4-13 (v.4)

Theme: Reason for rejoicing

Goal: Looking for what God did and does for us, we rejoice and give thanks.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: What are your thoughts mostly occupied with? With issues which you complain about?... or with issues you rejoice about and give thanks? We are very inclined always to complain, to share with others what is not so good in our life... as someone warned me about a certain person: “Don’t ask her ‘How are you?’ ...She will tell you all the details...” - I am aware of this weakness in myself.

On the other hand, we have lots of reasons to rejoice and have a grateful heart! And we do it as well! – Paul encourages us to “rejoice always”. And he says again: “Rejoice!” But there is an important and vital detail in this recommendation: “Rejoice in the LORD!”

The readings for today are all linked to each other and they present several reasons for what and why we shall rejoice in the Lord.

I – The LORD invites us to His banquet

The prophet Isaiah ^(25:6-9) writes about a big “feast of rich food for all peoples” that the Lord offers on His Holy Mountain. - Jesus tells the Parable of the Wedding banquet ^(Matthew 22:1-14). As the first guests rejected the invitation, the banquet hall was open to all, till “the wedding hall was filled with guests”. And King David confesses in Psalm 23: “You prepare a table for me...my cup overflows.”

God is rich in His mercy and “He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”

(Matthew 5:45), as Jesus said. Or, as Luther explains the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: *God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to evil people; but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.*

But it is not just the daily bread that these texts are talking about. Like Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for His son..." This is a parable and has a deeper meaning. It means the table full with forgiveness, love, life, salvation and whatever more is linked to these spiritual blessings. When the parable says: "Everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet", we have to believe it, to accept God's invitation and come. We don't need to do anything. It's ready! This is the meaning of the words Jesus cried out on the cross when He was offered for our sins: "It is finished!" (John 19:30). "Everything is ready. Come!"

Shall we not rejoice with this free invitation? - Last week my wife and I were invited by the Gideons for a banquet where 750 people gathered! And it was all free of charge! Should we have rejected the invitation? In no case! – But unfortunately many are refusing to come, or are not paying attention to God's free and gracious invitation.

The most tangible and visible sign of God's banquet is the Lord's Supper. He invites free of charges all who believe that Jesus died for their sins and that He gives His body and blood under the bread and the wine for forgiveness of sins. Therefore the Holy Communion is also called Eucharistia – from the Greek, which means we give thanks and rejoice! Pay attention to the Holy Communion Liturgy and notice how many times we give thanks and rejoice for this blessed gift of God.

II – The LORD dresses us up for the banquet

In the Parable, the guests who were invited from the street corners didn't have time or even the condition to dress up worthily for the wedding. - I experienced this in America: You have to wear a jacket in some restaurants. If you come in without jacket, they offer one to wear while you are dining; or you are not allowed to enter. – There was no problem for the guests of the Parable: The king provided decent clothes for each of them.

We are not worthy to come to God's banquet in our own clothes: our deeds, our justice, our sins... God is holy and His banquet is perfect. He provides white and clean garment for each of the guests. We will sing in the hymn after the sermon: *Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress... Bold shall I stand in that great day, Cleansed and redeemed, no debt to pay; Fully absolved through these I am From sin and fear, from guilt and shame* (LSB 563,1,2).

The Holy Baptism was given by God to cleanse children and adults from all sins and to clothe us for the Wedding Banquet. The Apostle Paul writes to the Galatians (3:26-27): “You are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have **clothed** yourselves with Christ.” When Gabriella was baptized today, she received new clothes from God and was accepted as God's child. And ancient costume of the church used to cover the baptized child with a white robe, symbolizing the righteousness of Christ. We rejoice and give thanks to the Lord for receiving new clothes to sit at His Banquet table. Can anyone reject to wear the free and clean clothes God is offering to us?

III – The LORD wipes away our tears

But it is not always easy to be happy and to rejoice. We are

surrounded by pain and sorrows, sufferings and persecutions. How can anyone rejoice in the midst of problems? Paul gives the answer. He was writing this letter to the Philippians from a prison. He was put to jail because of his faith. And he says: “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him (Christ) who gives me strength.” And Isaiah says: “The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces...let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.” We have to nurture our faith at the Wedding Banquet with the spiritual food God offers us in His Word and in the Sacrament, to be strengthened for bad times in our lives.

Regardless of their circumstances, Christians can rejoice that the LORD has forgiven them and loves them with an eternal love, a love that is triumphant over sin, death and all forms of evil (ABC 1447).

Conclusion: The words we speak at the end of each sermon come from this text: “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” And Paul adds: “And the God of peace will be with you.” *Peace of God is not merely a psychological state of mind. But an inner tranquillity based on peace with God – the peaceful state of those whose sins are forgiven* (CSSB 1822).

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” There are many other reasons why we can rejoice in the Lord, but these were highlighted today to encourage all of us to think about situations in our lives that we can rejoice always: The invitation to partake in God’s Banquet is still available to all, the clean clothes are still offered to all, and the consolation of God’s grace is a reality that we cannot deny. “And the God of peace will be with you.” Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Tow, 123 October 2014.