Joy: The Flip Side of Justice Worship Series: WEEK 1
Ninth Sunday After Pentecost – August 11, 2019

Calendar Notes

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Planning for this Series

August is often seen as the month of greatest transition in the liturgical calendar. Families begin to settle back into a predictable routine in preparation for back-to-school activities, fall festivals, and a time of harvest. Summer travels and vacations have presented opportunities for respite from regular, hectic routines. At the same time, the change of pace often has an impact on the spiritual and ecclesiological rhythms of our lives. For that reason, August can be a tremendous season to reignite faith communities.

Our primary theme provides myriad images depicting ways that justice and joy can and must coexist. Our guest writer, Rev. Doug Ruffle, says it this way, "Joy is found when we, as the people of God, put our faith into action by pursuing justice and championing the oppressed" as demonstrated in this month’s lectionary texts. While the lectionary calendar refers to this last portion of the liturgical season as Ordinary (ordered) Time—the longest season of the liturgical year (33 to 34 Sundays)—this time of refreshing might be more akin to "extra"-ordinary time. Ordinary time accounts for Christ’s life, miracles, and teachings, all illumined by his Resurrection. It is in this season that Christian people move and mature through ordinary time (tempus per annum), the complete Mystery of Christ! You will note how our biblical texts continue to hold this mystery before us. Our hope is that families will intentionally focus on these readings by not only reading them, but also by living into them with an expectation of a harvest of hope, faith, and grace. Thus, the liturgical color green stands as a symbol of hope and growth.

As you lead your congregation through this series, be mindful of ways to be perpetrators of justice and joy in the following:

- Planning back-to-school community events.
- Planting, cultivating, and harvesting community gardens that will help feed the homeless.
- Celebrating and teaching songs and prayers of the faith around campfires, in retirement homes, in children’s hospital wards, in prisons, and other places.
- Sharing 2020 list of graduates with college/university campus ministers.
- Having a summer planning retreat
- Preparing for special observances:
  - Hispanic Heritage Observance – Sept. 15-Oct. 15
  - Children’s Sabbath – Oct. 18-20
  - Reformation Day – Oct. 31
MUSIC RESOURCES

CLUW - *Come, Let Us Worship* (Korean)
MVPC - *Mil Voces Para Celebrar* (Spanish)
SOZ - *Songs of Zion*
TFWS - *The Faith We Sing*
UMH - *The United Methodist Hymnal*
URW - *Upper Room WorshipBook*
WSM - *Worship & Song*
ZSS - *Zion Still Sings*

**World Methodist Social Affirmation (World Communion Sunday)**

This is a musical setting for congregation or unison choir and congregation of The World Methodist Social Affirmation found at No. 886 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*. It is especially appropriate for World Communion Sunday, ecumenical settings, Pan-Methodist services, as well as for general use throughout the church year. Hoyt Hickman writes of this affirmation:

> This affirmation was adopted by the World Methodist Council when it met at Nairobi, Kenya, in 1986. It had been drawn up by the Council's Social and International Affairs Committee in a process that included the following: (a) all member denominations were invited to send a copy of their current statement of social principles; (b) representatives of each region of world Methodist met for a week and after intensive Bible study and examination of all the social principles statements formulated a first draft; (c) this draft was sent back to the member denominations for their response; and (d) the responses received were the basis of revisions in preparing the final draft for submission to the World Methodist Council, from which the hymnal version was drawn (*The Worship Resources of The United Methodist Hymnal*, Hoyt L. Hickman, Volume Editor. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989. pp. 201-202).

There are two musical editions:

*Full accompaniment version with melody, words, keyboard accompaniment and spoken text.*

*Melody-only version with music and spoken text for bulletin insert or congregation/choir part.*

**World Methodist Social Affirmation -- Full accompaniment version with melody, words, keyboard accompaniment and spoken text. (Sibelius format)**

**World Methodist Social Affirmation -- Full accompaniment version with melody, words, keyboard accompaniment and spoken text. (pdf)**
PREACHING NOTES

We welcome you to the first of a three-week series, “Joy: The Flip Side of Justice.” While all the lectionary readings will be considered for these preaching notes, we will focus especially on the first readings from the older testament.

A common theme in our Scripture lessons for the next three weeks is justice. We don’t often think of joy and justice together, yet if we look for joy in these passages, we will find it. Joy is found when we, as the people of God, put our faith into action by pursuing justice and championing the oppressed.

In the passage for Isaiah 1:1, 10-20, we hear the prophet rebuke us for forgetting to do justice in our actions while we are giving praise to God. It is not that God doesn’t want our praise and our offerings of worship. God wants us to worship while we also practice justice. Joy is promised when we “cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed” (Isaiah 1:17 NRSV). There is joy when we—as people of God—are willing to be obedient to God’s teaching.

Psalm 50 echoes the prophet’s words in Isaiah. Sacrifice in the context of worship gives honor to God, and salvation comes to those who “go the right way” (Psalm 50:23). While it is not on our list of readings for this Sunday, the theme in Isaiah echoes the familiar verse in Micah 6:8:
“... and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

There is a caveat in these lessons from the older testament. If we are obedient, we will find that joy of living. “But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword” (Isaiah 1:20). Joy comes when we obey God and thus, keep up our end of the covenant with God. Hardship will come upon us if we refuse to obey God’s teachings. It would be good to challenge our listeners with this stark contrast between obedience and rebellion. What might this mean in our day and context? How are our lives changed because of the choices we make? The lessons make it clear that we are the ones who choose to obey or rebel. In a real sense, our actions define whether we find joy or encounter brokenness because of the choices we make. It is not that we break God’s
laws in our disobedience. We break ourselves by these choices. Or, we find joy through obedience.

The lesson in Hebrews shows us another facet of how actions give testimony to our faith in God. The author of Hebrews defines faith (“The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,” Hebrews 11:1) and then demonstrates how it is lived out in the actions of those faithful followers of God who have gone before us. From Cain to Noah, from Abraham to Joseph, we remember the stories of faith and faithfulness manifested in the actions of people who live obediently. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, in obedience to God. He received joy when God stayed his hand and gave back the life of his son through whom his descendants would be more numerous than the stars in the sky.

If you prefer to preach from the gospel lesson, you will find in Luke another call to action. Just as Isaiah emphasizes actions that bespeak faith over empty praise, Luke calls on us to “Be dressed for action and have lamps lit” (Luke 12: 35). The caveats of the older testament lessons mentioned above apply here: blessings for those prepared or judgment for those unprepared for when the Master comes. Being prepared, for Luke, also echoes Isaiah. He is talking about living an obedient life in response to God’s teaching. Joy awaits those who practice justice (giving alms to the needy, being more ready to give to others rather get things for ourselves).

If you resonate with the overall theme of the three-week series, “Joy as the Flip Side of Justice,” then look for joy in the ordinary happenings of life. Invite listeners to find joy in everyday living. Give an illustration of what that looks like. Try to answer the question of how we define the meaning of joy in our day. The Scripture lessons push us to seek generosity toward others and avoid greed for ourselves. The lessons push us to live out our faith in everyday manifestations of justice and to consider such as true worship of God.

Here are some thoughts that could translate into a message for the lessons of the ninth Sunday after Pentecost:

- True worship aligns praise and social action (justice) – Isaiah and Psalm 50
- True treasure is not found in material things, but finds treasure in heaven (Joy) – Luke
- Finding treasure in heaven prioritizes providing for others (Justice), rather than worrying about possessions – Luke
- Can we find true Joy in living by “learning to do good” and “seeking justice” and “rescuing the oppressed”? – Isaiah
- Putting our faith into actions of justice toward other humans ultimately brings joy –all four lessons.
- Trust and obey—for there’s no other way
Joy can be the flip side of justice when the fruits of our generosity benefit the needy. Joy can be the flip side of God’s justice when we make choices that follow God’s teachings faithfully.

The Rev. Douglas Ruffle, Ph.D., serves as Director of Community Engagement and Church Planting Resources/Path1 at Discipleship Ministries. He also serves as liaison with The Upper Room. He is the author of *A Missionary Mindset: What Church Leaders Need to Know to Reach Their Community—Lessons from E. Stanley Jones* (2016), and *Roadmap to Renewal: Rediscovering the Church’s Mission, Revised Edition with Study Guide* (2017).
We continue our three-week series on “Joy: the Flip Side of Justice.” Last week, the Scripture lessons affirmed that joy can be the flip side of justice when the fruits of our generosity benefit the needy. Joy can be the flip side of God’s justice when we make choices that follow God’s teachings faithfully.

This week’s lessons continue to underscore the theme of justice. The Isaiah passage is known as “The Song of the Vineyard.” The seven verses are more of a parable than the poetry of a song. The prophet tells of a vineyard planted with “choice vines” and yet it yields “wild grapes,” or what the NIV calls “bad fruit.” The vineyard failed to live out the purpose for which it was created. The vineyard represents the people of God who were created to live lives of justice and righteousness, but who fail to live in this way. When the people fail to live lives of justice, it is because they fail to treat others with fairness and honesty. Instead of treating others as equals, they take advantage of people by mistreating them or abusing the power they may hold over them. When people live righteously, they live up to God’s expectations of fairness.

Use of a parable to tell the story helps the hearer to identify with what has gone wrong so that he or she can come to the realization of his or her own complicity with such behavior. The prophet tells the parable so that the people who have mistreated others—who have failed to be just in their relationships—can see themselves. Treating others unfairly, without justice, leads to devastating results. The vineyard will be “trampled down” (verse 5), made waste and no rain will fall on it. The prophet’s words were addressed to Israel and Judah, the northern and southern kingdoms, eight centuries before Christ. And yet, people who have economic or political power over others continue to demonstrate lack of justice. Even 2,800 years after Isaiah first spoke these words, we see manifestations of abuse of power and the injustice of the economically strong taking advantage of the economically weak.

Where, we might ask, can there be joy that is understood as the flip side of this story of injustice? Isaiah’s parable paints a picture of devastation in the wake of injustice. To find the flip side of joy, we must look to the verses of the psalm that is part of this week’s readings. Psalm 80 also refers to a vine, “a vine out of Egypt” (i.e., the same people of God addressed by Isaiah), and pleads with God to “come and save us” (Psalm 80:2b, NRSV). The psalmist pleads with God to “have regard for this vine” (verse 14b). It is a plea for restoration. This psalm of lament shows that the people of God have faith in the power of God to transform their circumstances and to bring restoration.

The reading from the book of Hebrews can offer us the flip side we seek for the strong words of judgment for our practices of injustice. The concluding verse from this week’s reading charges us to look “to Jesus the pioneer and perfector of our faith, who for the
sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame . . .” (Hebrews 12:2, NRSV). The joy that Jesus anticipated and for which he endured the ignominy of the cross, was the taking of “his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). Joy is the consummation of perseverance in faith through trials, difficulties, disasters that we experience in life. If we fix our eyes on Jesus and look to him for guidance, we too can experience a joy that transcends our failings. Ultimately, along with the psalmist, we affirm our faith in God in and through the person of Jesus the Christ and in him, we find joy.

The reading from Luke echoes the harsh tones of Isaiah in words of judgment and division. The hard work of responding favorably to Jesus’ invitation to receive or enter the kingdom of God comes with a price: there will be strife, division, in-fighting. Becoming part of God’s kingdom in response to Jesus’ teaching requires a deep level of commitment and the patience to endure suffering, as attested to in the lesson from the book of Hebrews.

Here are some questions whose answers might translate into a message for the lessons of the tenth Sunday after Pentecost:

- How can we as individuals and as communities of faith recognize our complicity with unjust behaviors?
- How do we plead to God to rescue us from our failings?
- How can we serve as champions of justice?
- What might justice, informed by faith in God, look like for our town, our state, our country today?
- Where do we find joy amid the clamor for justice?

Throughout human history, people of economic means and political power have abused their station and have brought devastation to the lives of people of less economic means and little power. It was true in the day of Isaiah. It was true in the day of Jesus. It is true today. The question for us is how to embrace a life of righteousness that seeks justice for all God’s people.

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We continue our three-week series on “Joy: The Flip Side of Justice.” Again, as with preaching notes of the previous two weeks, we focus our attention especially on the readings of the older testament, though we allude to all the readings. This week’s reading includes verses from the beginning of the book of Jeremiah as well as Psalm 71.

Patrick Miller, who served as a Professor of Old Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, reminds us that the book of Jeremiah is one of the longest in the Bible, surpassed only by the book of Psalms. It was written during one of the most difficult periods in the history of Israel, which included the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of the people of God. [For more information about the historical background of Jeremiah, see “The Book of Jeremiah: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections” by Patrick D. Miller in The New Interpreter’s Bible (Abingdon, 2001)].

Jeremiah has been called a “prophet of doom” because he announces strong words of judgment to the people of God and gives reason why judgment and devastation come to the nation of Israel. Jeremiah, as God’s spokesman, calls for repentance, for the people have been unfaithful to God’s teaching. Expressions that describe the people’s unfaithfulness include: lying, inability to correct bad behavior, and apostasy, a particularly strong word depicting total abandonment of following the rule of God.

- Where do we see lying manifested in our own day?
- In what ways might we be complicit in the dissemination of lies?
- Are we coachable? Can we learn to correct bad behavior? Who or what might help us?

The first reading for the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost includes the first six verses of “The Call of Jeremiah.” This call tells us that Jeremiah was appointed by God, assuring us that all that follows in this long book is God’s word. “Now I have put my words in your mouth,” says the Lord (Jeremiah 1:9b, NRSV). It also foreshadows the essence of Jeremiah’s message to the people, which will be “to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” We gain a glimpse of hope, even joy, when we notice the last of these couplets: “building and planting.” In God’s time and with the people’s repentance, there is the promise of a new day, a day to build and plant new things. In this couplet, we receive a foretaste of the promise that comes much later in the book, “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (Jeremiah 29:11, NRSV). There can be joy on the flip side of God’s strong words that bring justice to our waywardness. The joy comes because of repentance and turning again to trust God.
Hope is the main theme in the other reading from the older testament for this week: Psalm 71. “For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother’s womb. My praise is continually of you” (Psalm 71:5-6, NRSV). In the face of distress, when everything in life seems to be against him, the psalmist conveys utter trust in God. The psalmist’s words are the antidote to the apostasy that Jeremiah speaks against. Here is an example of a believer with unfailing faith and hope in the Lord. “My praise is continually of you” (verse 6).

The reading from the book of Hebrews gives us another reason to be filled with joy. The verses sum up the entire message of the book. In fact, these 11 verses sum up well the readings of these past three weeks from the older and the newer testaments. As followers of Jesus, we “have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly . . .” (Hebrews 12:22, NIV). Oh, how we long to be part of that joyful assembly, which is promised by Jesus when he invites us to receive and enter the kingdom of God. This kingdom, asserts the book of Hebrews, “cannot be shaken” (verse 27). “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire’” (Hebrews 12:28-29, NIV).

E. Stanley Jones, the great twentieth-century missionary and evangelist, often asserted in his writings and sermons, that the world yearns for peace and harmony. Too often, the political orders of our time have failed us, and our political leaders have failed us. Humankind has always fervently sought a leader who could guide us through confusing and difficult times. Jones affirmed that the order we seek in society is the kingdom of God and the leader we seek is Jesus Christ. Moreover, he affirmed, following the verses in Hebrews, the kingdom is unshakeable and the leader, Jesus Christ, is unchangeable. When, as our reading from Hebrews asserts, we “do not refuse him” (verse 25) and we do not “turn away from him,” then we enter the realm that cannot be shaken. This is the true joy that is the flip side of justice. It is found by following the unchanging leader and receiving the unshakeable kingdom.

The reading from the Gospel of Luke (13:10-17) tells the story of the stooped woman who is healed by Jesus in a synagogue on the Sabbath. The story underscores that, for Jesus, our concern (our actions of justice) for fellow human beings takes precedence over observance of the Sabbath. In last week’s reading, the Lukan passage warned us that the new realm inaugurated by Jesus brings divisiveness. That kind of divisiveness is evidenced here in the dialogue between the synagogue leader and Jesus. The leader of the synagogue takes issue with Jesus’ violation of Sabbath rules to heal the woman. Jesus responds by saying that we should do more for this daughter of Abraham than we would already do for an animal on the day of Sabbath. We should do justice. Jesus’ response echoes the cry for justice we read the first week in Isaiah and that is also in Micah 6:8. We should set the woman free of her illness. It is always more important to free up a human being from whatever binds him or her than it is to blindly follow the letter of the law. The crowd who observed the interplay of Jesus, the leader of the
synagogue, and the woman rejoiced “at all the wonderful things that he was doing” (Luke 13:17, NRSV). Herein is another invitation to find joy and here, especially, that joy is found when justice—doing the right thing—is displayed.

Some thoughts about messages that could be drawn from this week’s readings:

- God demands obedience and promises a future that builds and plants—a future of hope (Jeremiah).
- Faith in God, especially through difficult times, brings joy to our lives because it is grounded in hope (Psalm 71).
- We follow an unchanging leader and enter an unshakeable kingdom through faith in God through Christ.
- Joy is found when justice to the afflicted takes priority in our actions (Luke).
- To be happy in Jesus, trust and obey (all four lessons).

Joy and justice are two sides of the same coin. When we “cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed” (Isaiah 1:17 NRSV), we find joy. John Wesley exhorted followers to follow the simple rules of do no harm; do good; and stay in love with God. There is deep satisfaction of following these simple rules in life. Doing justice in our relationships with our neighbors, community, country spreads joy around and makes the world a better place.

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