

Texts: Acts 2:1-21 ; Philippians 4:4-7; John 14:16-17
Subject: Rejoice in the Lord
Theme: Rejoice
Sunday of Pentecost, June 5, 2022; Living Hope Lutheran, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven, and our risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

How can we rejoice?

When our schools are unsafe, when our churches are in crisis, when women and people of color and our LGBTQIA+ family are struggling to survive and elected officials spend their time obstructing each other's plans, and neighbors wonder how they will feed their children, or maintain their business, or be able to retire? how can we rejoice? It's easy to become despondent, to feel like there is no way out, and this is the beginning of our inevitable downfall.

Followers of Jesus, people of Living Hope - this is our time. This is the moment to which we have been called and ordained, to live out our baptismal promises, to listen to the needs of others, to bond together, to have faith, to devote ourselves to God and to one another, and to proclaim the promise of our God, who has not - who does not abandon us, but sends us an advocate - this is the season of the Holy Spirit.

The people gathered at Jerusalem for the festival of Shavout - the festival of weeks, since it was seven weeks after Passover - 49 days to mark the time of waiting in the wilderness, and more literally, the time of growing grain, that the first fruit of the promised land might be offered in thanksgiving to God. It was a celebration also of the giving of the torah, the law, or the teaching of God. The fiftieth day, like the fiftieth year, represented the jubilee - freedom from debt and slavery and rest. The people knew the

Spirit already - she was the wind that hovered over the waters, the voice of the prophets, and the presence of God in the world.

This is a reminder that the Spirit is uncontrollable: she blows where she will and moves God's people, often uncomfortably from stagnation to action, from isolation to community, from pain into healing. We've been through so much already - not just a pandemic - two years of exhaustion, gasping for breath, hiding from the world, where nurses and doctors and teachers and frontline workers were pushed past their limits to continue to serve in unimaginable conditions, but we've been through more - drought and fires, economic collapse, violence in the streets and wars between nations, 400 years of slavery and the ongoing effects of patriarchy and white supremacy - this nation, we the people have been through it and yet we survive. We are resilient in the face of danger and threats, we struggle and we overcome, we are empowered and healed and held by our God of strength who calls us not to have a Spirit of fear, but a Spirit of Joy! it is the power of the Holy Spirit that helps us all to persevere when times are difficult.

The Spirit is blowing in this church. Over the past six months, events took place in the Sierra Pacific synod - the one based in Sacramento that includes the Northern part of our state as well - that culminated with the dismissal of a Latino mission pastor on the day of the feast of Guadalupe, a day of particular significance, especially for people of Mexican descent. This was followed by accusations of acts of racism, abuse, bullying, and more. After months of pushback from people around the country, the churchwide office formed a 'listening panel' to hear the stories and experiences of the people of Misión Latina Luterana. The bishop of that synod, Bishop Meghan Rohrer while not brought up on disciplinary action, has been asked to resign by our presiding

bishop, Bp. Elizabeth Eaton. The report from the listening team, which was initially kept private, was released last week. It included information and conclusions that were shocking to some, and perhaps not taken seriously enough by the Churchwide office, causing many of our colleagues to ask for the presiding bishop to resign.

I have not spoken out on this issue, feeling that I didn't have all the information, or a deep enough understanding of the events, or that I wasn't a part of that synod, but we are one church. We are one body of Christ, and right now the body is bent, and broken, and suffering. This will likely be covered at our upcoming synod assembly, and certainly at the churchwide assembly in Columbus this August. There's no easy fix. How can we rejoice?

In this church we confess: we have not loved God with our whole hearts. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We know we will never get it all right, but the church, as a denomination needs to be better about welcoming and including God's people of color and our LGBTQIA+ siblings, speaking up for the marginalized, and putting our faith into action in meaningful ways without protecting the powerful, upholding standards of niceness, or bowing to whiteness in a way that harms our neighbors and the ones we serve.

The good news is we are one body whose unity is not in denominations, or flags, or skin tone, but in Christ Jesus. We are all equally called to the foot of the cross to repent for the ways we have failed one another. We are all forgiven and freed to radical love and rejoicing for the gifts God has given. And we *have* been called to persevere through hardship, to trust that God is God and we are not, that Christ is Lord and we are not, and that we are bound to one another in a spirit of love. This is the Spirit that blows

through the world every moment of every day, sustaining us in our walk of life, connecting us to God and to one another, cleansing us from all unrighteousness, forgiving us our failures, and making us into something new. Status quo is not an option. We are not going back to the good ol' days. We are the church here and now and we are being made and remade by the Spirit of God that is still speaking to us and through us.

Two summers ago, we saw the power of righteous anger over police violence and the death of George Floyd spill into our streets and the streets of cities all over this country. Many were offended by the destruction and violence that seemed to contradict the goals of those who showed up to protest. Others were offended that those in power failed to act in meaningful ways to end systemic injustice. We still are without answers to many of the problems that we face as a nation and a church. We lament for the violence that we see in schools, workplaces, supermarkets, and streets. We mourn and pray for the innumerable families who have now had to bury their children after a school shooting, and those who have lost their loved ones because of someone with a gun. We can blame God and shake our fists and wonder why God hasn't fixed this stuff for us. Paul could have done that as he sat imprisoned for proclaiming Jesus Christ across the known world. Instead, he tells the people to rejoice at all times. At all times! This is not a version of toxic positivity that views the world through rose-colored glasses but sees the world as it is and puts trust fully in God to give the power to bring about change. Do not worry and bring your requests to God. Trust that God is still at work in the world and in us. And there is work to do.

There is no doubt that we are in the midst of a major upheaval - okay many of them - but we can take it as a blessing: The Spirit is blowing. The Spirit is moving in us. We are not without tools at our disposal. Each one of us has gifts to use and share in our community to lighten the load of the people we meet. YOU have a meaningful role in the healing of our community: What do you think it is? What is it that is in you, that occupies your time, that feeds you? What is activating and inspiring to you? What do you do?

We worship. We pray. We share what we have. We accompany, teach, listen, accompany, advocate, repent, forgive, and love. We are parents and grandparents, siblings, neighbors, helpers, healers, feelers, and friends called by God to live in this kingdom, to gather as the church, to be light in the world. That is what we have been given - all this and more! We have been welcomed, loved, and provided for. We have been accepted and entrusted with gifts and responsibilities, we have been named and claimed by the Holy one who sees past all our failures and fears and awakens us again and again to be who we were created to be: children of God. The Spirit that accompanied Israel through the wilderness, that called and spoke through the prophets, that fell on the assembly in Jerusalem, and on each of us in our baptism will not leave us where we are, but bring us into God's preferred future.

For the opportunity to live and breathe and move and for the knowledge that we are not alone - for this we can rejoice!

For the power to learn and heal and forgive, for where we've been and where we're going we can rejoice!

For the love that sustains us when we are ripped to shred and worn and weary
and at deaths' door - we can rejoice!