May 20, 2018   
Psalm 104:24-34, 35b   
Joy

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Psalm 104:24-34, 35b The Inclusive Bible

God, what variety you have created, arranging everything so wisely! The earth is filled with your creativity! There’s the vast expanse of the Sea, teeming with countless creatures, living things large and small, with the ships going to and fro and Leviathan whom you made to frolic there. All creatures depend on you to feed them at the proper time. Give it to them – they gather it up. Open your hand – they are well satisfied. Hide your face – they are terrified. Take away their breath-they die and return to dust. Send back your breath – fresh life begins and you renew the face of the earth. Glory forever to God! May you find joy in your creation! You glance at the earth and it trembles, you touch the mountains and they smoke! I will sing to you all my life, I will make music for my God as long as I live. May these reflections of mine give God as much pleasure as God gives me! Bless God, my soul! Alleluia!

Today is Pentecost, the birthday of the Christian Church where the Holy Spirit came like a fierce wind and everyone could speak in other languages. We are pretty prim and proper people. It is hard to imagine something like that happening today. Here is the thing, the Holy Spirit doesn’t mellow with age. Today, the Holy Spirit creates new life in our midst, in us. Today the amazing 6th graders that have been in Confirmation class since last September will stand before us and profess their faith and join Greenland Hills. They will be asked this question, “Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?” They are supposed to answer “Yes”. The Holy Spirit works within each one of us to make a difference in our world, to bring the world more in line with God’s hope for the world.

When we see cruelty, inequality, or injustice in our world the Holy Spirit works within us to ask why is that? Am I a part of it? Am I willing to do something about it? Are there sacrifices that I’m willing to make to change it? It isn’t easy, but it is necessary. We speak up for what is right. We disrupt the status quo. That is what it means to be a Christian. The Holy Spirit is here, among us, within us. The Spirit has been poured out, and is waiting for us to act.

Did you hear how our scripture for today talked about the Holy Spirit? “Send back your breath – fresh life begins and you renew the face of the earth.” We share our space with an earth full of God’s creatures and every breath we take is a new creation. Did you known we breathe about once every five seconds? We have this gift of creation and God’s Spirit in us and with us, and the writer of Psalm 104 cannot keep from singing. In fact, the first Alleluia in the entire Book of Psalms is in Psalm 104. Everything that we have is a gift from God. Psalm 104 is about celebrating this gift of life that we have been given by living a life of humility, gratitude, praise, and joy.

Joy is the foundation of the earth, joy is in the need that we have for one another, to be in community. Pentecost is a great day to talk about joy. On that Pentecost day when people began to speak in other languages, people gathered and they were very confused. They didn’t understand how these disciples of Jesus from Galilee were speaking in the native languages all over the region. The crowd heard the disciples speaking about God’s deeds of power in their own languages. The crowd was amazed and perplexed and asked one another what this meant, but other folks sneered and said that the disciples were “filled with new wine” (Acts 2). Pentecost was a joyful day!

In a recent sermon, Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber talked about something that Dr. James Cone had said. Dr. Cone was the father of black liberation theology who passed away last month. He said, “Anger and humor are like the left and right arm. They compliment each other.” Nadia said that the depth of our joy is related to the depth of our pain because suffering excavates something deep inside of us. Alone we aren’t going to have joy all the time, but there is so much to be shared if we can lay down our jealousies, our fears of scarcity, our feelings of entitlement long enough to celebrate what is happening in the lives of others. We can have shared joy. She said that joy isn’t ignoring all of the evil in the world, joy isn’t pretending the forces of evil aren’t raging around us. Joy isn’t delusion, joy is resistance. It is resistance to Western individualism that seeks to isolate us and tells us narcissism is happiness. [[1]](#footnote-1)

Nadia Bolz-Weber said “Joy is resistance to the forces that seek to dehumanize immigrants, uneducated bodies, black bodies, brown bodies, queer bodies, female bodies.” Joy is the Holy Spirit bubbling up out of the caverns of suffering saying no to the forces that try and keep us in the tomb. Joy defies these things. Holy joy laughs at the powerful, and kisses the unclean. It is the joy that resists all attempts to extinguish our humanity. It is joy that holds anger in one hand and humor in the other. The joy that Jesus shared with his disciples far outlasted the Roman Empire that thought it had won by crucifying Jesus of Nazareth. Joy will always outlast pain. Joy will always reach into tombs and pull out life and declare that love is stronger. Tears may last the night, but joy comes in the morning.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This Pentecost day may we remember that joy resists despair and all the ways that despair wants to make death be the final word. May we resist going down the rabbit hole of our darkest thoughts and choose instead to feel the joy that God’s peace brings.

I find joy in this place called Greenland Hills. This church is constantly being reborn just like God’s creation as folks begin new ministries and have an experience of God. As a parent, the biggest gift that I receive from Greenland Hills is the many people who teach my children in Sunday School about God and about God’s love. I think of the amazing folks who come to Youth Group to hang out with my teenager and other people’s teenagers because they love God. Tonight my mom is bringing food for the Youth Group as the Confirmation kids come for the first time. Thanks be to God for the amazing people of this church that love kids because they are a vital part of this community of faith.

I have joy that I am a part of this wonderful community. I have joy that I am called to leave this place and bring the world more in line with God’s hope for the world. This life isn’t easy or painless, but we can turn our faces to the wind and accept that this is the storm that we must pass through.[[3]](#footnote-3) We are going to give our Confirmation kids one of my favorite sayings that is attributed to John Wesley, the first Methodist. “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.” On this Pentecost day may start we where we are, and do what we can. Do the next good thing and know that God in the Holy Spirit is in us and is with us. Catherine of Siena was a nun in the 1300s who said, “Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.” May it be so today. Amen.

1. Paragraph from sermon of Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber found here: http://content.blubrry.com/hfass/20180506\_Nadia.mp3 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Paragraph from sermon of Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber found here: http://content.blubrry.com/hfass/20180506\_Nadia.mp3 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. # Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama. *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World.*

   [↑](#footnote-ref-3)