



“Harvest Joy”

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
5:30 p.m., Saturday, July 2, 2016
8:15 and 11:00 a.m., Sunday, July 3, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 66:10-14; Galatians 6:1-16;
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Well it's another Fourth of July weekend, but things seem different from when I remembered growing up, at least it seems that way. I remember that twenty, thirty years ago every house would have an American Flag on it. This time as I was driving down to the church I didn't see too many flags, although there was one person who had about twenty flags in his yard to make up for the whole neighborhood. I watched a video the other day of someone interviewing people on a beach in California and he was asking questions about the Fourth of July and what made it special. So he asked some questions like; from whom did we get independence? And the people struggled to answer the question. He also asked questions about who is your favorite signer of the Declaration of Independence, and he said that some of his personal favorites were, Jessie Ventura, who was a pro wrestler. And they couldn't name any of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

I thought about that and I thought back to probably the biggest celebration I ever experienced of July Fourth weekend, and that would have been of course, the bicentennial 200 years, 1976. But then I thought about everything that was going on in the world in 1976. The president of the United States had resigned in disgrace only two years before. We had just gotten through one oil embargo, remember the lines getting gas? There was another one that was going to come two or three years after that one. Saigon had just fallen after a ten-year conflict with the United States.

Maybe it's not all that different from the world we live in today. We have our concerns about violence and war and terrorism. There's a basic distrust of politicians that was probably similar to 1976. But it's more than just that, it can also be deeply personal for us as we carry the weight of yesterday's failures and broken dreams, or the guilt of having crossed the line we never thought we would cross, and so many live with significant illness in their lives or the life of a loved one, and I don't know about you, but I've been to too many funerals for friends and family.

One of my favorite quotes of Martin Luther is when he's talking about faith and he said this; *“Faith is a living daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times.”* A living daring confidence in God's grace.

Do we believe that? Do we live it? Do we act as if that is something of certainty in our lives?

At the beginning of our worship service, we usually start with a confession. It's an appropriate way to start a worship service as we reflect on the week, our own failures and frailties. It's an opportunity for us to reflect at the baptismal font of being washed in the waters of holy baptism. Our sins forgiven, and then we are prepared not only to receive God's word but also the word made flesh in the meal of joy! Worship and confession for us is an Independence Day, an independence from sin and death, of focusing on the Lord of life and experiencing the peace and joy that he promises to bring all believers.

Spiritual writer, Henri Nouwen says *"that joy flows from Jesus' intimate communion with his Father."* And for a moment, you and I are allowed to enter into that holy communion with God. We're able to share forgiveness and the love of God which breaks in to a world that sometimes forgets, and we're able to experience joy.

In Luke's gospel he sends out seventy witnesses to the work that he is doing. There is a sense of urgency to that work. They go out into the places Jesus wishes he could visit himself, but he's getting closer and closer to Jerusalem and his ultimate end on the cross. He sends them out two by two, a common practice so that they might provide companionship for each other and protection. The disciples are to give and to bring peace, the peace of Christ, very different from the Romans who brought Roman peace at the edge of a sword.

The language that is used here is that of a harvest. In the Old Testament the harvest was a sign of God's intervention into human history, the gathering of all of God's elect, all of God's people together. It's also a sign of urgency because when the harvest comes, it comes. When everything is ready to be harvested, you don't look at it and go, you know next month works much better for me. The time is now and there is a short window to be able to take the harvest. Jesus sends the disciples out as lambs. It reminds me of the Sunday School painting that held in every classroom, Jesus with the lost lamb over his shoulders. Lambs are defenseless and utterly dependent, and so we as lambs are defenseless and dependent upon God.

Jesus says to pack light, don't worry about all the extra stuff that you need to bring. My wife needed to hear that before we moved the last time, that would have been really helpful. . . sorry. It's like those people that work in emergencies, right, they say you should have a "go" bag, just a couple things of clothing, maybe a day of food just in case. The point here is, we need to be quick to respond. When it's time for the harvest, it's time to go, it's immediate, don't worry about all the stuff. And so too, the church needs to be in that immediate thought about doing God's mission and ministry. Too often we were ready to set up all of our committee meetings to talk about what, and how, and why, and then the moments gone, the harvest has come, it's rotting in the field. Now is the time, Jesus says, and when we go, offer peace, not just any peace, the very peace of Jesus Christ, the peace that brings life.

It is the word of a tremendous invitation to join God on his mission, but notice too, it also comes with a warning. There is the call to follow and then there is the warning of what happens when we don't. The call is to one of repentance, of redirecting one's life to the purposes of God, of taking seriously of what happens at that baptismal font and at the confession that we make before the service, and then to respond to that good news in Jesus Christ for you and for me to actually live in God's peace and the joy that is offered. That is good news brothers and sisters.

When the disciples return they tell Jesus that even the demons submitted, those same demons that Jesus cast out are now cast out by the disciples. They are given the strength and the power in the ministry of Jesus to do the very things that he was able to do. Such is the power of his love and the peace that he brings. The sharing of God's gospel, doing the gospel, then brings and creates joy.

Mother Teresa said it so well, "*Joy,*" she says, "*is prayer: Joy is strength: Joy is love: Joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls.*"

So as the church we are called to be those "bringer and shearers" of the joy that we have in Jesus Christ. We are called to share the message of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the new life that he promises to each one of us, that new life that was born in the waters of baptism for you and for me. Now the message that we bring should be a personal one. It's not seven easy ways to get to heaven. It's your story that you will share, God at work in your life, through good times, through bad times. No one can take that story away and you know that story better than anyone else. It's your story, it's your story about Jesus at work in your life and so make it personal and go deeper in your own relationship in Christ. See those moments of intersection where he has made a difference in your life and be willing to share that with another person. Build relationships with people, not because you want to get them into church or so that they become a member of Trinity. Build authentic relationships because God calls us to love and like links in a chain it will be a strong relationship founded in that story of Jesus in your life.

Remember the Greek word that is used for church - *Eu-cle-sia*, literally means "called out." Each one of us is called out into the harvest to do the harvest, but don't let it get to your head. Christ reminds the disciples that it's about Jesus in you and we can rejoice because we have been claimed by God. After all, that's what Christianity is, it's a community that loves to love God, neighbor, the world around us. The joy of the Lord is our strength. And so this weekend, celebrate an Independence from sin, death and the devil! Victory is complete! Satan falls! And we are called to harvest in the mission of Christ because we too are his servants in the ministry that we share at Trinity. So let us celebrate and serve the Lord and share the kingdom of God come near! Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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