

## **PSALM 98**

O sing to the Lord a new song for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory. The Lord has made known his victory; he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

## **JOHN 15:9-17**

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

## FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT: PART II

### THE OTHER SHOE

**Psalm 98**  
**John 15:9-17**

“Don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater.” “God willing and the Creek don’t rise.” “I’m waiting for the other shoe to drop.” We have some great colloquialisms which we all use from time to time to give expression to commonly held wisdom. Oftentimes, we use them without knowing their origins. “Don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater” came from rural America when the entire family gathered for its weekly bath in the giant tub. The order of bathing was from the eldest to the youngest; the baby being the last. In other words, don’t cut down the apple tree because of one rotten fruit.

“God willing and the Creek don’t rise” has nothing whatever to do with a flooding stream. The Creek were a particularly war-minded native American tribe who were mostly indigenous to Florida. Hence, I will be there unless fate has something else in mind.

“I’m waiting for the other shoe to drop” is a remnant from 19th and early 20th century city life when blue collar denizens lived in cheap tenement housing projects. Families were squeezed into small spaces in poorly constructed, thin-walled buildings where you could hear the activities of everyone who rented rooms around you. So when someone above you was preparing for bed, the dropping of a shoe made a very audible thump causing everyone below to delay finishing conversations until they heard the other shoe fall. Today, we use that expression after something bad has happened to bemoan our fear that some further misfortune is on its way.

In this post resurrection period between Easter and Pentecost, we are exploring an appropriate response to God’s supreme act of sacrifice in offering up Jesus for our redemption from sin, paying the price for us. In Part I, we saw that from a biblical perspective, this was a critical event in the eternal warfare between the forces of evil and the forces of good—darkness

versus light. In whatever terms you want to describe it, this struggle undeniably exists in our world and even in ourselves on a deeply unconscious level. Watching the news for a week inundates us with evidence of the ongoing conflict.

The effect of this deluge of negativity is that the resurrection presents us with an existential crisis of faith. What difference has God's activity in the world really made? We are still going to die. We are still going to get sick. We are still exposed every day to cruel twists of fate over which we have absolutely no control. We don't know what God wills and we sure as heck have no idea when or where the Creek are going to rise or for that matter, when the other shoe is going to drop.

Ironically enough, both of our scriptures for this morning are focused squarely on the antithesis of all this angst—joy. *Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth in joyous song and sing praises...Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy and the presence of the Lord...*

*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

Joy? Really? Well, yeah! That would appear to be the end result of living our lives in a state of love. So as we continually play our roles in the fray between the forces of good and evil; in our spiritual quests to move from darkness into light, a key question we must answer is this: what prevents us from having joy? What obstacles stand in our way? Is it the other shoe?

To answer this question, we must first understand the difference between happiness and joy for though they are relatives, they are not identical twins. Happiness is generally event based and in that sense, it is circumstantial and fleeting. You can be happy one minute

because your team is ahead and you are anticipating the thrill of victory and devastated seconds later when a desperate heave from the other end of the court goes swish at the buzzer breaking your heart.

Joy is not like that. It is not based upon the results of external events. Joy is spiritually based. Its origins are on the internal level. So there is a constancy to it that is not disturbed by the agony of defeat, twists of fate or the actions of other people which have impacted us, but are beyond our control. All of which is to say our experience of joy is not contingent upon being selected as the super lottery winner making us millionaires.

Let's look deeper. There are actually two components of a joyful life. The first is totally impersonal in the sense that it is outside of our control and the second has everything to do with us in terms of our own actions. Examine our scriptures more closely and you will see this. In Psalm 98, the foundation for joy rests upon Divine activity: *O sing to the Lord a new song for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.* So, yes, let us celebrate what God has done, but let us also know that it does not stop with the past for God has made future promises as well: *let the hills sing together for joy and the presence of the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth...with righteousness and the peoples with equity.* Past, what God did; future, what God will do.

In John, we see the same: *As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you...* Past tense. It is nothing we did on our own. And then later in the passage, you have the promise for the future: *I appointed you to bear fruit, fruit that will last so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.* And this is important because without the future promise, you are always going to be left with the "yeah, but what have you done for me lately?" disclaimer. So joy obviously relies upon a strong element of faith in something outside of ourselves. But that is just the first half. We are not children; we live in an adult world. Adults have responsibilities. There can be no lasting joy that endures the crushing storms of life without our own actions which are personal and so completely within our own control. *Go and*

*bear fruit...This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.* Do you really imagine that you can have joy in living without love?

So let us return to our earlier inquiry: what are the obstacles that stand in the way of your joy? Waiting for the other shoe to drop is symptomatic of fear. And if it is fear in which we live, it is likely that our trust in God's past activity is leaking oil which probably means that our faith in God's promises for the future are a little shaky as well. This is absolutely understandable because remember that this is the component of joy over which we have no control. And we don't like that! We want to be in control.

So let's focus on what we can control. We control our own actions. We control our own decisions. We choose whether we want to give of our time and talents, whether we wish to respond to the needs of our community, our families, our nation. The gospel tells us that love and joy are inseparable. To love abundantly is to live abundantly.

And, yes, sometimes it is inconvenient. Sometimes we are tired. Sometimes, we just plain don't feel like it. And sometimes we will choose not to respond. But other opportunities will always arise, you can be sure of that. The issue is more our overall approach to life and the attitude with which we approach it.

Salman Rushdie puts it into these terms in his novel, *THE GOLDEN HOUSE*: *The crux of a great person's life is the choice between doing what is right and what he wants to do. Abraham Lincoln, who was a proficient wrestler and enjoyed a good bout, probably would have preferred spending his time on the mat to starting a war in which approximately two percent of the population died, roughly six hundred and twenty thousand people, but it was the right thing to do. No doubt Marie Curie would have preferred to spend time with her daughter instead of being killed by X-ray radiation, but guess what activity she chose. Or take the case of Mahatma Gandhi, who when young showed himself to be a sharp dresser in a British bespoke suit which was a whole lot nicer than some loincloth. However, the loincloth, politically speaking...*

Do we have the faith to make the decisions? Do we have the courage to bear the fruit?  
Will we still be there after the other shoe has dropped?

Reverend Thomas Dunlap, May 6, 2018