

Revolutionary Rejoicing
Sermon for the Chrism Mass with Renewal of Ordination Vows
Diocese of Minnesota
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When Archbishop Desmond Tutu spoke at the Skoll World Forum in Oxford in 2015, he came out on the stage, and instead of beginning his speech, he just started laughing. He walked from one side of the stage to the other, laughing without words or context, until the whole audience was laughing along with him. He was, of course, demonstrating the contagious power of laughter and joy. In fact, one of the main tools he used to confront the social and political evils of his day was his disarming joy. It was, in many ways, the central feature of his character. Not righteous anger, not brave witness, but contagious, effervescent joy. His life and legacy show that rejoicing is revolutionary.

And it might just be that what the world needs most in this moment, it might just be that what we are being called to in our time, is a revolution of holy joy. It's the command Paul comes thundering at us with this morning: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." Like Desmond Tutu, Paul had to deal with some stuff in his life. He is writing this letter from prison, facing a possible execution. His congregation, like most congregations then and now, has plenty of petty squabbles to sort through, and they are struggling under the fickle winds of government persecution. But despite all this, more than a dozen times throughout the letter, he urges them to rejoice. With bitter divisions within and oppression without, how in the world are they supposed to rejoice? In all the challenges we are faced with in these days, how are we supposed to rejoice?

It is easy to be angry. It is easy to be heartbroken. It is easy to be weary. But how are we supposed to rejoice?

Paul's program is twofold. First, joy will not be found by looking to our own abilities and goodness, but by looking to God's power alone. You can rejoice in the Lord always, Paul says, because "The Lord is near," and God's peace will "guard your hearts and minds." You don't rejoice because you feel good enough, or you are good enough. You rejoice because you are soaked in God's goodness, which is an ever present guard.

And second, just as joy is not found in our internal power, neither is it found in our external circumstances. Joy doesn't emerge from getting our way, or by imposing our preference on the world around us. As Paul puts it earlier in the letter, in that great hymn of kenosis in chapter three, joy grows from putting ourselves aside and "putting on the mind of Christ." Joy can only be found when we remember that liberating truth that your life is not about you. Your life and mine are to be about one thing and one thing only: Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

To find joy, we look to God, not ourselves, and we trade our own mind for the mind of Jesus. In a heavy season, our work is to be priests and deacons who fan the flames of revolutionary rejoicing. The forces of empire and oppression are funded by a currency of anger and scorn. Our work is to build an ecclesial economy that trades in the currency of joy and love.

But make no mistake: heeding the command to rejoice in this moment is not some therapeutic recipe to feel good when things are hard. That's not what joy is. Holy joy, sacred rejoicing, is an

act of sedition against the present world order, because to rejoice is to affirm that there is something far more powerful, the power of God's love. Feeling good comes from everything within or around us being ok. We don't have that luxury in this moment. But we can rejoice when we fix our eyes forever on the almighty power of the living God of love. That is your job and mine in this ministry we've been ordained to share: to fix our eyes on the almighty power of the living God, and to help the people we love and serve do the same.

In a moment when so many who claim the name of Jesus do so with faces distorted by anger and hatred, we are called to look like joy. We will struggle, to be sure, for justice, we will fight the forces that break down the children of God, we will harness the righteous anger of the prophets, but we will do all of that, not with faces distorted by hatred and anger, but with faces beaming with contagious joy.

In our gospel lesson today from the end of Luke, the risen Jesus—physical, fish eating proof of love's power over evil—tells them they are witnesses to these things. They, and we, are witnesses to the Jesus who in the events of this week does not meet murderous violence by flexing his own power, but by throwing himself on the power of God's love.

What we are for is witnessing to that power, and exuding that contagious, revolutionary, joy. Christian witness is not just to tell of something that has happened, it's to tell of something that will happen. Our job is not just to tell our people what has happened or is happening. It's to tell them what by God's power has been promised. Beloved community, perfect peace, life triumphing over death. Our witness is to help the people we care for see what cannot yet be seen.

Because when we see what cannot yet be seen, we engage the current struggle with a joy that can turn the whole world upside down.

Rejoice in the Lord, always, my dear, beloved siblings. Again I say, Rejoice!