

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

Pentecost 17
Saturday, September 26, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, September 27, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

“You Are Holy”

Philippians 2:1-18

As we are in the midst of spending a few weeks reading through Paul’s letter to the Philippians, it quickly becomes clear that he means for us, his readers, to be filled with encouragement. This letter is widely regarded as the most encouraging of all his writings. Ironically, this is written while he is sitting in prison for the terrible crime of being a Christian, and he has been a prisoner for some time – and he will remain a prisoner the rest of his life. Yet, he is filled with joy – not the happy euphoria that we often equate with the concept of “joy.” But rather, Paul is filled with, you might call it, a sense of relief or (the lifting of burdens).

The joy Paul has is that no matter what may come, no matter what burdens or persecution or execution comes his way, whether he finds himself in a time of need or a time of having plenty, he is filled with joy, relief, and contentment. Whether or not Paul will ever get to see the good people of Philippi again, what is important is that they, together, remain in the faith of the Word which Christ has given – that He has died for our sake, and He is risen so that whether I live or whether I die, I do so to the Lord.

So, last week, we heard Paul begin his letter to the Philippians saying I desire to die and be with Christ – complete communion and fellowship with Christ

– which is better by far. However, I know that I have “fruitful labor” here in Christ’s church on earth. “Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you.”

And this clear Gospel of Jesus dying and rising being the only thing that matters is what we joyfully and boldly tell everyone who will listen – even telling it to those who stand against us; even if our telling them will inspire them to do us harm. What is happening in the places like Nigeria these days is shocking to those paying attention, yet it barely makes news. Thousands of Christians are killed every year by Muslims in Nigeria. Villages are burned to the ground. Young girls are made to be slaves and forced into marriage with Muslim men. Unfortunately, it is the history of the people of God. We, simply, have chosen to ignore it throughout most of our lives. In the country of Sudan alone, two million Christians have been killed since 1950. It got so bad that in 2011 the U.N. was forced to finally do something and separated the Christians in South Sudan into their own separate nation and give them protection from the Muslim north.

There is no glorious life of faith for the people of God here on earth. And those outside the church tend not to care when Christians suffer. That is just an historic reality. It’s the way it has always been. And I understand why. The joy of the Gospel and our contentment in Christ is the stench of death to those who do not share that joy, or are angry with God, or despise the Living God. We are to live in contentment in the shadow of the cross – knowing that the glory of this life has never been the goal. As we heard last week, “To live is Christ, to die is to gain.”

So all of what Paul has been talking about in the first part of his letter is concerning Jesus and what He has done; what He has provided by His suffering. It would make sense that what follows is also all about Jesus.

So Paul says, “If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation (koinonia) in the Spirit.” We are going to spend some time on this word this week and next week because it shows up again. This is a favorite word of St. Paul.

Koinonia can mean “participation” here (as it is translated), so long as we realize that you and I are not the ones causing the active participation. The word can also refer to community, a fellowship – like in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. If you read the books or saw the movies, their “fellowship” is a good demonstration of “koinonia.”

The dictionary definition is to “share with someone in something.” In I Corinthians, this is the Holy Communion word. We have “koinonia.” But we only have this because of the presence of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. We have a real union and communion and participation, but we aren’t the ones making it happen. This is God’s work in you.

It is similar to what we have been talking about in a few of our Bible classes of late. What does it mean to be “holy.” Holiness, biblically speaking, is about proximity to God. When Moses was instructed to take off his sandals because the place where he was standing was “holy ground,” there was nothing special about that dirt. It was just that the dirt was in close proximity to God in the burning bush.

When Moses met with God and he would come back to tell the Israelites what the Lord had said, his face would be glowing, not by virtue of his own goodness, but he had gotten closer to the divine and the lingering radiance remained. That is holiness. The people of Israel were holy because God was in the middle of them. And He was continually cleansing them of their unrighteousness, taking their sins upon Himself so that a blood sacrifice had to be

made each year to make atonement for the ark of the covenant – the footstool of God.

Most people today speak of “holiness” as if it is simply being led by the Spirit of God to do good works, conducting your life according to the commandments of God. Holiness is about proximity, closeness to God. We are to read, mark, learn and “inwardly digest” the Word of the Gospel. We are to have a participation (koinonia) in the broken body and shed blood of Christ.

Then, as we more and more engage in holy things: God’s Holy Word in the Holy Bible, remembering your Holy Baptism, participating in Holy Communion, calling upon God’s Holy Name in prayer. This all puts us into proximity to God, which shapes our minds and leads us to conduct our words and actions in a way that reflects the Holy Will of God.

It is beyond fantastic that we offer Holy Communion in each of our worship services each weekend, and now twice on Wednesday. The actual body and blood, given and shed for you on the cross; the broken body and shed blood of the Son of God Himself is here in close proximity to you each and every week. The Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel and enlightened you with His gifts of Word and Sacrament. That is holiness.

Holy Communion – participation in the close proximity of God happens here because the Word of God is joined to bread and wine. Christ says, “Take; eat; this is My body. Take; drink; this is My blood.” God physically enters you in a way in which even Moses did not get to participate.

Draw near and partake in the fellowship of Christ and the people of God; have koinonia; participate in the body and blood of the Lord. You are holy. Amen.