
Rejoice Sunday

The Very Reverend Sam G. Candler
A Sermon at The Cathedral of St. Philip
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Parish Meeting Sunday

For those of you paying attention to the newsletter today is Parish Meeting Sunday. For those of you paying attention to the Gospel today is another John the Baptist Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent. For those of you paying attention to the sports schedule today is the day the Falcons play the Saints. (It's going to be a tough game there!)

For those of you who are Anglo-Catholics, paying attention to every jot and tittle of the liturgy, today is "Stirrup Sunday," named after the Collect of the Day, when the celebrant prays, "Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us." To those of you paying attention to the Christmas calendar, you have 12 days to get the remainder of your Christmas presents!

This morning, I have still another name for the day. Today is "Rejoice Sunday." Actually, historically, this is another genuine name for the Third Sunday of Advent, for it takes its name from the New Testament epistle which was once the lesson always read on this Sunday; Philippians, chapter 4, verses 4 through 9. "Rejoice in the Lord, always, and again I say, Rejoice."

When we hear these words said so simply and gleefully, we may forget that Saint Paul wrote these words to the Philippians while he was in prison. Prisons are tough for anybody. That is why these words should strike such a rich chord for us. It is from prison, when times were tough, that Saint Paul writes, "Rejoice in the Lord, always, again, I say, Rejoice." If you were to read the entire letter, you would find the word "rejoice" mentioned several times. In fact, Saint Paul writes it 22 times, in four chapters. From prison, Paul encourages his people to rejoice, 22 times.

For many of us, living almost two thousand years after Saint Paul, this has been a tough year. We still do not know if our financial economy is recovering or not. Even if it is for some people, it is certainly not for others.

How challenging, then, that today is also 'Pledge Sunday' at the Cathedral of St. Philip; and many of us have completed our pledge cards, pledge cards which we will bring forward in a few minutes and offer to God. Many of us do not know if our financial pledge is the right one or not. These are tough times.

Not many of us are in prison like Saint Paul was. But many of us do feel trapped during this annual season before Christmas. Maybe the energy of this season seems shallow to us. Why do I have to go to this party? Why do I have to feel a certain way? Do I have enough money?

Today, Saint Paul is the encourager. He is the one who declares, no matter where you are, no matter what circumstances you are in, try "Rejoicing." Now, let me suggest to you that "Rejoice" does not mean making yourself feel a certain way, against your will. I think the two little letters "r and e" have something to do with the word. We do not say "Be joyful," today. Don't try to create something that isn't there.

Instead, reach down inside yourself and find that tiny drop of joy that is there. I believe it's down there somewhere. There is joy in somewhere in our heart today. If we are alive and moving today, there is some juice there. "Rejoice" really means to "rejuice" yourself. Reach down and find that small drop of joy inside you, and re-fortify it, re-juice it. Rejoice.

This year has brought tough times to the Cathedral of St. Philip. We have had to cut back here, do without there. We have to make less money and fewer staff work for more events and more hours.

But, let me tell you today, on Parish Sunday, there is joy at the Cathedral of St. Philip. There is joy and wonder at the Cathedral of St. Philip. Our joy and wonder have kept many a person alive in this past year. Our grace and excellence have moved families and communities. Our generosity has supplied outreach efforts and mission agencies.

In fact, there has been much more than merely drops of joy at the Cathedral during this past year. There have been gallons and tons of joy and wonder. It has been amazing. No matter how trapped I have felt this past year, no matter how stymied or discouraged, the joy and wonder of the Cathedral has been a constant source of encouragement and love.

So, this morning, the Third Sunday of Advent, Parish Meeting Sunday, I -like Saint Paul""encourage you to "rejoice." Yes, we have uncertainties in life. We have tough times in life. But neither of those circumstances is stronger than the joy of our Lord.

In our blessings each week, the clergy of this parish actually repeat the last words of this familiar passage from Saint Paul, and so I close with them. See if you recognize the logic:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ,The Lord is near.

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things,.and the God of peace will be with you.

-Philippians 4.4-9

AMEN.

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Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

Comments? Contact Dean Candler at: SCandler@stphilipscathedral.org