
A Meditation on “Rejoice in the Lamb”

An Evensong meditation by the Rev. Canon Cathy Zappa
The Sixth Sunday of Easter – Year B

It is always special to gather here for Evensong and to close the day together, with song and prayer and holy company. There is something about knowing, in the hustle and bustle of the day or week, that there's a resting place at the end of it: a place and time where we can gather the day's bits and pieces, highs and lows, all that we've done and left undone, and lay them down at the altar, offering and entrusting them to God. Knowing that, whatever we've been through, we can proclaim God's praise, and sing, and pray. And we are not alone.

So we gather again, from different places, different kinds of days, with different experiences and feelings and needs. Whatever you bring with you this evening, it belongs. All of it, and all of us, belong. All our voices belong—and are called for! “Shout with joy to the Lord, *all* you lands,” the psalmist says, “lift up your voice, rejoice, and sing!” And together, we make the most glorious music! Together, we sing the most glorious praises to God!

Now, some of you may be thinking, “Not me. Not today.” Or if you're like me, “I'm not a singer, or a musician. I come here to pray... and to hear the choir sing.” And we do have a magnificent choir! And they have prepared an extraordinary piece for us, which they'll sing as soon as I stop talking: *Rejoice in the Lamb*, composed by Benjamin Britten in the middle of World War II and of his own “horrible attacks of depression.” The text is excerpted from an 18th-century poem that Christopher Smart wrote from an insane asylum. Two voices rising up to God and humanity out of darkness—coming together from different darknesses, in different times. Still praising God. Still rejoicing, and drawing us today into that praise and joy that, like the peace of God, passes all understanding.

Like our Psalm, the cantata summons all creation to lift up its voice, rejoice, and sing: “Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb. Nations, and languages, and every Creature in which is the breath of life. Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together.”

Then they appear. From every corner of the world and of the poet's imagination: mighty figures from the Old Testament with mighty beasts; creatures great and small, ordinary and extraordinary. Flowers with their angels, the very poetry of Christ. A man in despair, and those who don't understand him. Letters and words, instruments and sounds and even silence: all come forth and praise God in their own way, with the voice and the very being that God gave them.

And together, they make music. Together, they magnify God's name in the most magnificent way, with the most magnificent music. Somehow, all these beings—all these diverse beings, with their diverse experiences and voices and tempos and styles—somehow, they make the most magnificent music, together. Because God is “the inimitable artist”—the creator of them all. They magnify the Lord by simply being what God created them to be.

They, like we, come from so many places—and maybe carry within them so many experiences and ways of being and singing—that it can be hard to tell how they will fit together. Until they do. Until they sing, each of them, not trying to figure it all out ahead of time, but appearing before the Lord, lifting up their unique voices, offering what they can and who and what they are. Trusting in God's blessed intelligence, trusting in the music that God is making, the music that is unfolding, in all of creation and in all of us. At all times, in all places.

In God's song, everything belongs. Everyone belongs. “Hallelujah for the heart of God.”

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