

The Sentinel-September 2018

JOY:FULLY LUTHERAN 1 THESS 5:16-24

JOY:FULLY LUTHERAN

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.” 1 Thess 5:16-24

Happy 160th Family!

On September 23rd; yes, a few weeks from now, we are going to officially celebrate our 160th anniversary. With most anniversaries, it's a special time filled with family and friends, gifts and kind thoughts as well as food—nothing like a feast! However, let's not forget that these celebrations are also filled with joy!

You know, family, when you think of our church, being a member, being “Lutheran,” do you think joy? When you tell your neighbors and friends that you are a member of St. Stephen—Horicon, do they say that we are a joyful people? When you go to worship, do you go in joy, listen in joy, sing in joy and leave with joy?

Paul says, “Rejoice always” (v. 16). That's really the whole verse—easy to memorize. Rejoice. Always. And why should we rejoice always? In fact, as Christians, we always want to rejoice, because Jesus loves us; because He died and rose for us; because the Spirit has called us by the Gospel into this saving faith; because God is faithful to His promises, and He will surely do it (v. 24).

“**Joy:fully Lutheran**” is not only our Synodical theme through the 2019 Convention, but also a theme this congregation will embrace throughout the year. For example, “**Joyfully Lutheran**, we live in response to God's love for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We live **joyfully**, because God's love is freely given to sinners through faith for Christ's sake. We live **joyfully**, because we do not work to earn God's love and forgiveness but receive it by faith alone in what Christ has done for us.

Joyfully, we receive God's Word and Sacraments as His means through which He gives to His children His love and mercy in Christ. We live **joyfully**, because though we cannot believe by our own reason or strength, the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the one true faith in Christ Jesus. We live **joyfully**, because that Father invites us to pray to Him as children talk to their dear father. We live **joyfully**, because Jesus has done it all for us.

Furthermore, our joy is not generic joy. We are not just happy people. We are **joyfully Lutheran**. We live our lives trusting in the mercy and love of God. Our Savior suffered for us, and we know that our lives also will be filled with trials and suffering, yet we live in joy.

Joy does not mean that we ignore the realities of our lives. Faith in Christ does not remove us from the trials and temptations that befall people in this life. Faith in Christ does not mean that we cannot suffer or sin. Faith in Christ points us to the hope we have in the midst of the difficulties of this life. And Christ is our joy.

The cross is the most prominent symbol of Christianity. We proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. With our Lord, we know that suffering and pain is inherent in our lives as we dwell in this sinful world. With our Lord, we do not expect sinners to embrace the Kingdom, but trust that it is through suffering and death that the Kingdom comes among us. With the Lord, we bear our own crosses and rejoice in the will of the loving Father, even when it seems hidden from our view.

The Christ on the cross is the Christ who conquered death and the grave. We rejoice, because our sins have been removed from us. We rejoice that death no longer has the final word over our lives. We rejoice that our Savior is coming again. We rejoice in the promises of life with Him forever. We rejoice that He is with us in His Word, Sacraments and Church.

Therefore, we are enabled to confess: “I, a poor miserable sinner, am **Joyfully Lutheran**, because of Jesus!” Yes, God's love in Christ is the reason for joy—our joy! In fact, grace, faith, forgiveness, suffering, learning, repenting, washing, eating, drinking, fellowship, mercy, and life together are all joys in Christ.

Rejoice always and Happy Anniversary!

Pastor Seehafer