

“How Can We Keep from Singing?” Psalm 150 Rev. Joyce Kirk-Moore
November 22, 2009 San Dimas Community Church, United Church

The Hebrew people had a close relationship with God so that they could express to God both praise and pleading, both joy and anger, both gratitude and complaining, both song and sorrow. The Psalms, all 150 chapters, contain all these emotions and more. And Psalm 150 is a string of ways and means of praise; everything and in every way is to praise God.

One year ago Tom and I were preparing to take leave from you and enter a time of deep angst as his bone marrow was wiped out and he was taken to the edge of death and then infused with stem cells and new life. We weren't with you physically but your presence was not far from us. And now a year later we are both here, Tom's doing well, and “how can we keep from singing?” Over the past year in this church we've celebrated marriages and births; we've celebrated the lives of those we've loved on earth and who are no longer in pain and suffering; we've celebrated festivals and dances, new members and resurrections; so how can we keep from singing?

I remember another time when our little church seemed to be at a plateau and I even had self-doubts wondering why I couldn't “grow the church.” A wise colleague said to me “If you're a mainline church and not losing numbers, you're a success.” And I know that the question is not how BIG we are but how faithful we are. It is true that we can't predict whether generations after us will find this sanctuary a place where the spirit thrives but in the here and now as we are faithful as best we know how, as we have the care of one another to uphold us in the face of adversity, as we pay attention to those beyond our sanctuary walls who need help, how can we keep from singing?

As we watch our children grow embodying possibilities for the future, as we watch with wonder and pride as they become the “light of God” in their own unique way and gain confidence, and see right from wrong, how can we keep from singing?

As we study the Bible together learning more deeply, hearing more clearly the meaning of ancient words as they relate to us and to our world, as we experience “ah ha” moments that nurture our souls and feed our spirit giving deeper meaning to our lives--how can we keep from singing?

Now I am not Pollyanna, there's a lot wrong out there. There's suffering, dying, unemployment, poverty; you know the list. But in the midst of our efforts to work for change, right wrongs, ease suffering and be God's prophetic voice, sometimes we need to take a “time out” to praise, give thanks, and sing. And today is that day. Today our cup is not only half full; our cup runneth over.

Soon we will share a feast. We may experience it as “just really good food that we didn't have to cook all by ourselves.” But whether we realize it or not it is a feast of what has been, what is, and what is to come. It is a feast to feed not only our bodies but also to feed our souls. The fullness of life we share is not because we've earned it but rather because we are blessed and therefore energized to make our whole world a place where everyone is invited to the heavenly banquet: all...including the poor who can't afford it, the rich who don't deserve it, the sick who need comfort, the healthy who have strength to share, the lonely who are depressed, and the popular people who can afford to share a little friendship with others. We gather together to ask God's blessings and to give blessings of our own. I don't know of a church where church is only one person; church is church because it is community.

Perhaps you've heard the story about the difference between heaven and hell. In heaven there is a huge banquet table, and many people seated around it. Men, women, young and old, children and old folks, all together, like one big family. Each one of them holds a very long fork. On the table is a feast. The people look well-fed, very happy and satisfied. They are talking, laughing, hugging and look like they are having a good time. In "hell" is a scene not all that different. In fact, it is almost exactly the same. But the people don't talk, laugh, or hug. They look angry, suspicion and distrust are on their faces. And they are stick thin, obviously starving.

So what's the difference? In hell, there is no love and trust, and the people bear grudges. The spirit of giving and sharing is also absent, the people are selfish and only think of themselves. Unfortunately, the forks are too long for people to feed themselves, and when they use the forks to pick up the food, they are unable to reach their own mouths. So they go hungry, and are very unhappy. These negative feelings multiply and give rise to other negative feelings, like anger and bitterness.

But in heaven, the people love each other. They may have their differences and they may make mistakes, but they learn to forgive. They may have their selfish instincts, but they learn to share. They learn to give without first taking. When a person is hungry, all he or she has to do is ask, sometimes they don't even have to ask before someone from across the table uses his or her fork to pick up some food and feed the one who is hungry.

You see, in heaven, they, too, have forks which are too long to feed themselves. But they don't allow this slight obstacle to deter them. In heaven, they feed each other. That's why they don't go hungry. And this spirit of giving and sharing breeds even more love, that's why everyone is so happy and satisfied with life, not just physically, but emotionally too.

And this is why church is always more than the number one. We are community feeding and loving one another because God first fed and loved us. For the gift of this church; for all the gifts of life, of God, of humankind and all creation, how can we possibly contain our joy, how can we keep from singing?"