

SERVICE OF WORSHIP
Christian Joy

Let us worship God, let us pray:

Our loving heavenly Father, give us all a sense of your presence with us as we gather now for this time of worship.

Give us a sense of gratitude as we recall your blessings, penitence as we recall our sins, hope as we seek your forgiveness and joy as we remember your love.

We lift up our hearts to you now in humble prayer and heartfelt praise, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HYMN

1. Give me oil in my lamp,
Keep me burning,
Give me oil in my lamp, I pray.
Give me oil in my lamp,
Keep me burning,
Keep me burning
Till the break of day.

Chorus:

Sing Hosanna! sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King of kings!
Sing Hosanna! sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King!

2. Give me joy in my heart,
Keep me singing.
Give me joy in my heart, I pray.
Give me joy in my heart,
Keep me singing.
Keep me singing
Till the break of day.

Chorus:

Sing Hosanna! sing hosanna!....

3. Give me peace in my heart,
Keep me resting,
Give me peace In my heart, I pray.
Give me peace in my heart,
Keep me resting.
Keep me resting
Till the break of day.

Chorus:

Sing Hosanna! sing hosanna!....

4. Give me love in my heart,
Keep me serving.
Give me love in my heart, I pray.
Give me love in my heart,
Keep me serving.
Keep me serving
Till the break of day.

Chorus:

Sing Hosanna! sing hosanna!....

SCRIPTURE READING

John 15:9-17 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 **I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.**

12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will

give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

MESSAGE

The Christian religion is a religion of joy and of happiness. Joy is- or should be- the characteristic element in the Christian person's life. If we have a faith in God through Christ then we should rejoice.

Those scholars who enjoy compiling statistics tell us that the verb 'to rejoice' occurs seventy-two times in the New Testament and the word 'joy' occurs sixty-two times.

So, from the very beginning to the very end the New Testament speaks of joy. When the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her that she will conceive and give birth to a son, he said: "*Greetings! The Lord has blessed you and is with you*" (Luke's Gospel 1:28) Then, at the very end of his ministry, when Christ meets his friends and his followers after the resurrection, he uses the word 'greetings' (Matthew's Gospel 28:9).

The word 'greetings' literally means 'joy be with you'. So, the Gospels, from beginning to end, speak of 'joy' being with believers. Why is this? Why should we be so joyful?

First, because we have a right relationship with God. We should enjoy God and take delight in him and in our relationship with him. King David, in Psalm 16, tells God: "*In your presence there is fullness of joy, and in your right hand are pleasures for evermore*" (verse 11)

To be in God's presence, to enjoy fellowship with him, is a greater blessing than anything that can be imagined: "*My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God...[for] a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere*" (Psalm 84:2 & 10).

What does joy founded on God mean? Dr. G. Campbell Morgan was a highly regarded preacher who was pastor of Westminster Chapel in London between 1904 and 1919 and then again between 1933 and 1943. He told the story of a man whose shop had been burned to the ground in a Chicago fire. The man arrived at the ruins next morning carrying a table.

He set this up amid the charred debris, and above it placed this optimistic sign: *‘Everything lost except wife, children and hope. Business will be resumed as usual tomorrow morning’*. The Christian’s joy is like this; it cannot be conquered, it rises above circumstances because it has its source in God himself.

We can’t buy God’s love. God does not say ‘I will love you if you prove yourself worthy’. Instead, God says ‘I love you just as you are’. God says ‘I see behind all your masks, defences and pretensions, and know you better than you know yourself, and I love you despite your open or secret sins, despite your unworthiness’.

We are justified- things are made right between us and God- not because we love God, but because in Christ God loves us. God does not demand that we love him before he loves us, or that we are punished for our sins. God just loves us.

So, how should we respond to this love? Well, we should respond in faith. Our faith does not enable God to love us, instead, it is our human way of acknowledging, receiving, enjoying and returning the love God had for us before we thought of loving him. Our faith does not change God from being against us to being for us, but it does change us from being closed to being open to receive the love God has always had for us.

All this is known as ‘Justification by Grace through Faith’. It is the foundation of our Christian joy.

When we have a true and lovely relationship with God then it leads to a new and deeper relationship with people. John wrote this: *“We love because God first loved us. If people say, ‘I love God’, but hate their brothers or sisters, they are liars. Those who do not love their brothers and sisters, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have never seen. And God gave us this command: those who love God must also love their brothers and sisters”*. (1 John 4:19-21).

There is joy in forgiveness, love, reconciliation and fellowship with others. There is particular depth of fellowship which we receive and experience in

the Church- the 'body of Christ'. It is a struggle for anyone to be a Christian by himself or herself. To be a Christian is by definition to belong to the Church. Even during these days when we are in lockdown and unable to worship together in the same building, we are still conscious of being part of a fellowship, we are still worshipping together though in different places, we are still thinking about one another and praying for each other. This all gives us comfort and strength and reminds us that there is no such thing, really, as a purely individualistic relationship with Christ. As Claude Welch says: "*There is no private Christianity, for us to be in Christ is to be in the Church and to be in the Church is to be in Christ, and any attempt to separate relation to Christ in faith from membership in the Church is a perversion of the New Testament understanding*" ('The Reality of the Church').

It is significant, I think, that Jesus started his ministry by calling the disciples (for example, Matthew's Gospel 4: 17-22). So, from the very beginning there was a fellowship. If we read the Apostle Paul's letters, he makes it clear that although he was by nature an individualist, he had experienced the deepest joy and most constant contentment through fellowship and oneness with other believers. Jesus himself shared a very close relationship with his disciples. He told them that they should love one another as he had loved them (John 13:34-35).

Therefore, we have joy because we have a right relationship- a good relationship- with God. We have joy because we have fellowship with one another, and finally, we have joy in and through service.

'Service' is one of the great words of the English language. The deep meaning of this word is revealed in a painting by the Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens, entitled 'The Incredulity of St. Thomas'. In the painting, Christ is showing his hand- with the mark of the nail clearly visible- to Thomas who had been unable to accept the testimony of the other disciples that they had seen Jesus alive after his death upon the cross. Jesus is saying to Thomas: "*Put your finger here and look at my hands....*" (John 20:24-29). It is a wonderful painting, but look closer and deeper and you will see that Jesus' hands are strong hands; hands which show the marks of service: "*I am amongst you as one who serves*" (Luke 22:27).

To serve others is to reflect the teaching and the actions of Jesus. Some of the happiest people on earth are those who are doing most for others.

So then, how can I sum up the whole idea of Christian joy? Well, generally, the world does not associate joy with Christianity. This is partly due to a misunderstanding of the Christian way, which sees the Christian faith as continually stressing sins, the evils of the flesh and other things and the importance of the 'narrow way'. However, this misconception in the minds of people about the depressing nature of Christianity, is partly our fault, because we as Christians often don't explain our faith properly to people, and we don't always show Christian joy in our lives.

The fact is, any Christian who is consistently dower has missed the power and the point of our faith and is certainly not reflecting the way of Christ, which is, in the words of the song: 'Joy unspeakable and full of glory'.

Let me finish with this little story. Andre Massena was a French general during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. A story is told that he once led eighteen thousand troops to the outskirts of an Austrian town. The town was defenceless and was on the verge of surrendering when the priest reminded the townsfolk that because it was Easter they should hold a church service first. This they did. When the French troops heard the bells of the church ringing out joyously they thought it was a signal that Austrian troops had arrived to defend the town and so the French troops retreated. The message of this story is that very often worship and the joy of faith in God can drive away our fears, our anxieties and our problems.

Let us always remember the words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians: "*Be full of joy in the Lord always. I will say again, be full of joy*" (4:4).

To the glory of God. Amen

PRAYER

God of hope, fill us with all joy as well as with all peace in believing.

We have so much to thank you for. We thank you for the wonder of this life and we praise you for the blessings of being alive. Though at the moment we are confined mostly to our homes, we look forward to that day of joy when we can visit places, meet people and enjoy new pleasures. The joy of this world can never be exhausted in this life's fleeting span.

We thank you for the wonder of your love. We do not know what the future has in store for us, but what we have no doubt about is that you will be with us, enriching our lives, deepening our joy and bestowing upon us innumerable blessings.

We are so grateful God for the wonderful church fellowship to which we belong. We pray that you will bless all the members and friends who are part of our church family. It is such a joy knowing that as we are worshipping now we are joined by others of our fellowship. We remember them in our prayers and ask you to bless us all.

Lord of the Church, you have given each of us gifts, help us to use them in the best way in the service of others. May we be generous in giving and humble in receiving. Take as as we are and make us what you want us to be; and so fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may serve you and others faithfully, to the glory of your name. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven... ..

HYMN

1. Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

2. We are pilgrims on a journey,
we're companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

3. I will hold the Christlight for you

in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

4. I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.

5. When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

6. Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

BLESSING

May the love of God surround us; may the strength of God uphold us; may the peace of God comfort us; and may the blessings of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and always. Amen.
