

August 1, 2010 Communion

## MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE TO THE LORD

When you read our hymnal there are instructions on how to sing. You need to sing loud, on key, with enthusiasm. I thought “I wonder what God thinks of our singing?” After all some of us don’t sing to well, we might sing to low, way too loud, maybe a little off key, maybe a whole lots off key. But in all honesty in God’s mind we make a joyful noise unto the Lord, with enthusiasm and with reverence.

This communion Sunday I thought why not use hymns to tell the old, old stories that we love to hear. So I offer these hymns of our faith I believe touch lots of hearts.

The first is **‘WONDERFUL GRACE OF JESUS’** written by Halden Lillenas in 1918. He gave this account of how it came to be composed: *‘In 1917, Mrs. Lillenas and I built our first home in the town of Olivet, Illinois. Upon its completion, we had scarcely any money left to furnish the little home. Having no piano at the time, and needing an instrument of some kind, I managed to find, at one of the neighbor’s home, a little wheezy organ which I purchased for \$5. With the aid of this instrument a number of my songs were written which are now popular, including “Wonderful Grace of Jesus.” It was sung by the great chorus in 1918 at Northfield Mass. Bible Conference, being introduced for the first time.’*

He then sold the hymn, get this, for \$5, just enough to pay for the organ on which it was composed.

Once again God is good...all the time...and all the time...God is good. God's grace, what a wonderful thought for communion Sunday. It reminds me of 'the matchless grace of Jesus' that reaches out to all sinners saying, 'Come to me all who are burdened for any reason and I will give you rest.' And that is what I believe Communion is all about.

Just a few things about this hymn. First the wonderful Grace of Jesus is **GREATER THAN ALL OUR SINS**. You see, that wonderful grace sets us free. It's like a giant weight being lifted from our souls. Someone told me while they were sleeping they felt a heavy burden on their chest. That pain was so uncomfortable that person thought they were having a heart attack. They thought, "Who shall I call? I'm having a heart attack. I'd better call 911." Eyes now opened that person noticed one of the cats was standing on their chest just looking out over the room like he was some king surveying his kingdom. It was the weight of his paws causing all this discomfort. This person, said, "Praise the Lord, I'm okay." And brushed the cat aside with a laugh and smile. Jesus lifts our burdens, the ones that are bigger than cat's paws, by taking them upon himself at the cross.

God's grace is greater than all our sins means God forgives big time! We see that in the Lord's Prayer when Jesus said we should pray "forgive us our sins as

we forgive those who have sinned against us”. We see it in the first letter John wrote where it states, “If we confess our sins our Father in heaven will hear that confession and will forgive our sins. And if we say we have no sin then we call God a liar.” We hear Jesus say it over and over again, especially when he told Peter to continue to forgive those who sinned against him even if it is multiple of times. Or the woman caught in adultery when he told her also to go and sin no more. Or the crippled men who he told to rise and walk after he told him his sins were forgiven.

The second thing about the wonderful grace of Jesus is this; **IT REACHES TO ALL WHO ARE LOST.** Isn't that what we learn from Scripture? Jesus came to save the lost, those who think they have drifted far, far, away....those who think they have sinned the sin that can never be forgiven. Whether it is a tax collector, who cheated the people, or a woman caught with a man not her husband, or a crippled who received healing and forgiveness, Jesus tells us that his blood was shed on Calvary for everyone and for every sin, no matter what background they come from, what religious affiliation they belong to. His grace is offered to all. After all, isn't that what John 3:16 states? God sent his son so that whosoever believes in him can have eternal life.

The prodigal son found that out after he took his inheritance and blew it on wine, women and song. He found himself sitting in the pigpen caring for the

unclean animals Jewish people avoided. Broke, no friends because his money was gone and no one wanted to be his friend anymore he got this job taking care of pigs found himself sifting through the pig's garbage just to find a bite or two to eat to keep going. The Scripture says "he came to his senses," which I translate, 'he woke up to what he had been doing wrong.' He awakens to the fact that his dad's hired hands had it better than he did, so he pulled himself up, brushed himself off, got his last paycheck, and was ready to get back in the race toward heaven as he headed home thinking all along maybe, just maybe his father would forgive him for being such a fool. When dad saw him from a long way off, we all know what he did. Dad ran down to hug and welcome home one who was lost and now found; one who was blind but now could see. Isn't that what our God does all the time? Those arms of Jesus that are stretched out on the cross are arms that welcome lost sinners to come home. The angels in heaven rejoiced for another lost soul had been found, while on earth there was a great banquet because the lost son had returned home.

Grace! He didn't deserve it, but it was what he was given, which leads to the final wonderful Grace of God thing. It **REACHES THE MOST DEFILED**.

Now we might have a hard time with that thinking I know a whole lot of people that have done some pretty bad things that should never be forgiven or even in heaven. If I were a betting man, which I'm not, I'd bet there are going to be

people in heaven that you wonder how they got there....and some you think will be there, won't. Hopefully we will all be glad that we have made it there.

That's the workings of God's grace. In fact, some might even have said of some people who have done vicious things "I hope they rot in hell!" But we aren't God. At the altar of grace everyone who repents and believes is welcomed to the banquet table, even if it's a death bed confession. I can think of Paul being invited. His crime was arresting Christians. In fact, he was there giving a thumbs up to the stoning of Stephen by the high court of religious leaders. Stephen died right at Paul's feet. Then, he got more warrants and headed to Damascus to arrest more Christians, maybe have them beaten, maybe fed to the lions, maybe hung on a cross like Jesus. My friends Saul was not a nice guy. However, a thing changed when he met Jesus... his heart was strangely warmed... he got his new name and the next thing you know he was preaching about this same Jesus who saved a wretch like him.

So you see, his love and forgiveness is available for all who will receive. That is why we call it the 'wonderful grace of Jesus all sufficient for even me. Broader than the scope of my transgressions, greater than all my sin and shame.'

**TAKE OUT THAT INSERT AND LET'S SING ABOUT THAT  
'WONDERFUL GRACE OF JESUS.'**

The second hymn I want us to think about this morning is a more contemporary hymn that made it to our hymnal not too long ago. Written in 1971, the story goes like this; *“When Bill and I started our family in the sixties, racial tensions were tearing the country apart. Civil rights activists had suffered and some had been killed. The Vietnam conflict was claiming thousands of lives, and tensions boiled over onto university campuses. Many young people were growing disillusioned and ‘dropping out.’ In this climate Bill and I sought to write songs with lasting answers to the turmoil of the human spirit. But in the fall of 1969 we learned we were expecting our first child and my body had not recovered from the last pregnancy. To top it all off, Bill had contacted mono which left him exhausted and depressed. All these things discouraged us and we occasionally asked each other, ‘If the world is like this now what it will be like in 15 or 16 years for our baby? What will this child face?’ While pondering and praying about these things we came to realize anew that our courage doesn’t come from a stable world, for the world has never been stable. Jesus himself was born in the cruelest of times. Now we have babies, raise families, and risk living because the Resurrection is true. When our baby arrived safe and sound we named him Benjamin, which means ‘most beloved son.’ A few weeks later “Because He Lives” was born in our hearts and poured from our souls.”*

That's the story of the wonderful hymn written by Gloria and Bill Gaither, "Because He Lives."

A few things about this hymn that fits communion Sunday. First, because he lives, **WE CAN FACE TOMORROW**. What a great joy it is to know no matter what this life throws at us, Jesus is the same today as he was yesterday as he will be tomorrow. What a joy it is to know because he lives I can meet my problems, my struggles, my heartaches head on. I don't have to be afraid. It doesn't matter what that mean old devil puts in our way today, we can look toward tomorrow as a better day. The light at the end of the tunnel is the light of Jesus Christ for our salvation. Our hope isn't just in today, it is in our tomorrows. Because Jesus lives today, I have all that I need for my tomorrows. Because Jesus lives there isn't anything that He and I can't solve today or tomorrow or the next day.

Then because he lives **ALL FEAR IS GONE**.

Let me take you back to our boat ride experience and the fear the disciples had when Jesus was not with them when the storm hit. Maybe they were sleeping when the storm hit. Their first thought was, "Jesus, you took a fine time to leave us alone." When the storm was at its worse, who comes water-walking on water, perhaps asking, "Hey fellows, you got room for me in the boat?" none other than Jesus. Some thought it was a ghost. However, Jesus yelled for them not to fear, because it really was he. Even Peter wasn't quite sure, so he told the Master to let

him walk on water with him. “Come on Peter, get out of the boat, be a water-walker, test your faith. You can do it! You won’t drown. I’m here.” So one foot at a time goes over the side and the next thing Peter knows he is standing on the water not holding on to anything but his faith. A few steps toward Jesus, the next thing you know there is a gust of wind and instead of looking straight ahead, Peter looks toward where the wind was coming from, and then looks down to see his feet beginning to sink into the water up to his ankles, his knee caps, his waist. He looks at Jesus and yells, “Master, help me I’m about to drown.” Jesus reaches out and saves him, gets him in the boat and says to him and his friends “Don’t be afraid. I am always with you. I want you to know, without a shadow of a doubt, you need never to fear, just call my name. I will never abandon you. I will never stop loving you. So fear not! For I want to remind you of this. Because I live, you and all those who believe and trust in me will never die, so there is nothing ever to fear for I am just a call away.”

And then the third thing is this, **HE HOLDS THE FUTURE IN HIS HANDS**. It’s as simple as that! **He holds**, not the devil, the future in his hands. **He holds**, not the devil our future in his hands. **He holds**, not the guy in the red suit the world’s future in his hands. I’ve already told you I’ve read the end of the story and it has a happy ending. Another chorus teaches us, “He’s got the whole

world in his hands, he got you and me brothers in his hands, he got you and me sisters, in his hands, and he's got the whole world in his hands."

Let the people of God rejoice and say "Amen!" because Jesus has got the whole world in his hands. And because he lives my friends, we can face tomorrow with courage. Because he lives we can face tomorrow with no fear. And my brothers and sisters, life is truly worth living, just because he lives.

**TURN IN TO NUMBER 364 AND LET US SING WHY GOD SENT HIS SON**

We turn to our final hymn in preparing our hearts to receive the elements of communion, the precious bread, which is his body...the precious wine, which is his blood.

I picked from all those hymns we have in and out of our hymnal a hymn that tells us that those who have been spiritually lost can find new hope. Those who are spiritually dead can be revived. Psalm 85:6 reads, "Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?" Or we find in Ezekiel God breathed new life in the dead dry bones of the valley.

We've sung about the wonderful grace of Jesus that changes lives and because he lives we can face tomorrow without fear. Now we come to the final hymn that wants to give us new life, a new start. We come to the communion table just as we are, sinners in need of grace... bought by the blood of Jesus

sinner in need of hope... repentant sinner in need of assurance. We need to be revived. It only takes a spark to get that fire going again. God wants to rekindle the flame of our faith so we can become one again with the Lord.

In 1863 a Scottish Doctor W.P. Mackay writes, *“My dear mother had been a pious and godly woman, quite often telling me of the Savior, and many times I had been a witness to her wrestling in prayer for my soul’s salvation. But nothing had made a deep impression on me. The older I grew the more wicked I became. One day a seriously injured man was brought into the hospital, the case was hopeless. He seemed to realize his condition and asked me how long he would last. I gave him my opinion in as cautious a manner as I could. “Have you relatives whom we could notify?” I continued. The patient shook his head. His only wish was to see his landlady because he owed her a small sum and also wished to bid her farewell. He also requested his landlady to bring “The Book.” I went to see him daily. What struck me most was the quiet, almost happy expression constantly on his face. After the man died some things about the deceased affairs were to be attended to in my presence. “What shall we do with this?” asked the nurse, holding up a book in her hand. “What book is it?” I asked. “The Bible of the poor man. As long as he was able to read it, he did so, and when he was unable to do so anymore he kept it under his bed cover.” I took the Bible and....could I believe my eyes? IT WAS MY OWN BIBLE! The Bible which my mother had given me when I*

*left my parents' home and which later when short of money I sold for a small amount. My name was still in it, written in my mother's hand. With a deep sense of shame I looked upon the precious Book. It had been comfort and refreshing to the unfortunate man in his last hours. It had been a guide to him into eternal life, so that he had been enabled to die in peace and happiness. And this Book, the last gift of my mother, I had actually sold for a ridiculous price. Be it sufficient to say that there gained possession of my Bible was the cause of my conversion."*

Thus came the hymn, "Revive Us Again." *"We praise Thee, O God, for the Son of Thy love, for Jesus, who died and is now gone above. Hallelujah! Thine glory! Hallelujah! Amen! Hallelujah! Thine Glory! Revive us again."*

As we prepare our hearts to receive the elements of grace let's turn to our final insert and sing this great hymn of faith as our prayer seeking God's grace and unbinding love in our lives as we respond to his invitation to come as sinners to the banquet table in order that we might leave refreshed, renewed and revived. Let the God of grace, the Son who lives breathe new life into us this morning. Let a revival in this church begin this morning with us.

Let's sing! REIVE US AGAIN