

3 July 2016
Pentecost 7

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Rejoice In This”

Text: Luke 10:1-20 (Isaiah 66:10-14; Galatians 6:1-10, 14-18)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

There are many reasons to rejoice. Let me tell you a few from this past week, as the youth and I went to the Higher Things conference in Nashville.

I rejoiced when we got back home yesterday and I could finally get out of the car.

We rejoiced when we finally got to the hotel Friday night after midnight.

We rejoiced whenever someone had to eat a nasty Mike & Ike candy as we drove last night as part of a game we play in the van

We rejoiced when we finally got to the dining hall our first evening on campus after following people who thought they knew where they were going but in reality were wandering aimlessly through the labyrinth of walkways that make no earthly sense on the Vanderbilt campus.

And we rejoiced when Rob got the nasty nectarine out of our car on Friday after it had baked in the heat for four days in a hot, closed up car and got all squishy, disgusting, and foul.

If you don't quite get or understand all those references, ask one of our youth later.

And that's all good. God wants you to rejoice. He doesn't want mopey Christians, trudging around this world and life in bitterness, sadness, and fear. No, He would have us be joyful Christians, living in confidence and faith. Confidence in His love and faith in His goodness. God wants you to rejoice. Joy is the second gift of the Spirit.

So what happens? Why don't we? Because sometimes we rejoice, or look for joy, or think we find joy, in the wrong things. In sin. In having or getting what God has not given to us, but we've taken anyway. Or, we rejoice at the *right* thing for the *wrong* reason. That's what the disciples did in the reading we heard today. They rejoiced that the demons were subject to them because of the authority Jesus had given to them when He ***sent them out ahead of Him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.*** (Some of us know kind of what it feels like to walk to every town and place now, after all the walking we did last week!) But anyway, the disciples thought, that was cool. They were powerful. They could boss demons around! Right thing, wrong

reason. Jesus had given them authority not so *they* would be powerful, but so their neighbor would be set free. So their neighbor would rejoice with them. So their neighbor would have their name written in heaven too. . . . Oh yeah. That too. No, that first and foremost.

But that's what sin is, isn't it? Relegating what really matters to second-tier status, and making what doesn't really matter first. Making *higher things* lower, and lower things higher. Taking a good gift from God - because everything from God is a good gift - and using it wrongly; rejoicing in it wrongly. And sadly, we do. Satan can't create, but he can pervert, and so tempts us to do the same. To take the people God has given us and use (or abuse) them for our own purposes. To take the good gift of sexuality God has given to a man and woman united in holy marriage and instead pervert it in countless ways. To make money and possessions our gods, our idols. Using the gift of speech to tear down and not build up; to justify ourselves and excuse ourselves instead of repenting.

But there is no joy in any of that. Sin is like a drug that creates addicts who just want more and more. So there is no joy in justifying yourself, or in making excuses. Try it. . . . Well, I don't need to tell you that - you already have. And so you get away with it; you avoid punishment. Happy? Not really. There is no joy in that. But repent, and then hear this: *I forgive you*. No just getting away with it. No condemnation. No guilty conscience or self-loathing following you around - just joy. The sin is gone. No skeleton in the closet to reappear later. That's better. There is joy.

And to use what God has given for the good of others, to set our neighbor free, that your name may be written in heaven - **is what Jesus did for you**. And it brought Him great joy. When He forgave sinners, when He called and ate with tax collectors, when He rescued those trapped in sin, when He accepted the outcast - it wasn't just them rejoicing, He did, too. For now, in Him, their names are written in heaven.

Now, sometimes that joy doesn't come right away. Sometimes there's some pain and suffering first. Parents know this. So do kids. The joy of graduation is preceded by years of hard work. The joy of the dining hall is preceded by half an hour of aimless wandering.

For Jesus, the joy of your names written in heaven meant first being accused of being demon-possessed. It meant rejection by the people He grew up with. It meant nails. It meant whipping. It meant crucifixion and death. But the joy . . . the joy that your name would be written in heaven made it worth every taunt, every mock, every stroke of the whip, every hammer upon nails penetrating through skin and flesh, and every moment in the cold, dark grave. The joy that you would be with Him. And not just now, but forever.

And when the joy does come now . . . sometimes that means sadness later. The sin that entices and promises joy may not be so good after all. ***Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you***

Bethsaida! Woe to you Capernaum! You are rejoicing wrongly. In what will not last and what is not good. Repent, Jesus says, before it is worse for you than Tyre and Sidon; worse than Sodom. Strong words. Those are strong words that should make us sit up and take stock. That's why Jesus spoke them, then and now.

So the demons subject to you in My name? I saw satan fall like lightning from heaven, Jesus tells the disciples. And maybe the disciples were thinking: *aw, man, we want to see that!* But Jesus wasn't one-upping them - or maybe He was. But if He was, then just for this reason: that they realize there's a better reason to rejoice. To rejoice that their names are written in heaven, where there *are* no demons that need subduing.

And you, all of you, here's another reason to rejoice: not just that your names are written in heaven, **but that heaven's name is written on you.** The name of the triune God written upon you when you were baptized, marking you as His. And you know what happened when that happened? The demons fled and the angels rejoiced. *Depart unclean spirit and make way for the Holy Spirit.* Good news. Great joy. The same joy the angels had when Jesus was born into this world is the same joy they have when you are born again, born from above, into their world.

But satan isn't one to give up and we are still ***lambs in the midst of wolves*** who want to devour your joy and give you sadness and regret. Look around. But the joy Jesus gives isn't just in the absence of the wolves but even in the midst of them. For He is in the midst of them, with us. In His Word, His forgiveness freely and joyfully given. In His Body, the Bread of Life, and in His Blood to give us life. The joy of heaven come down to earth to take away all sorrow and sighing, all sadness and regret, and provide us with confidence and hope.

Isaiah put it this way, in the Old Testament reading today: ***rejoice with Jerusalem*** - that's you. You are the new Jerusalem, the Church of God, His people, where He now dwells with His mercy and His gifts. And to you He has given these gifts. You have drunk deeply of His Word and been refreshed by His food. When times were good and especially when they were tough. That you have His joy. A joy far deeper than mere happiness. The joy of your Saviour with you, and you not alone. Ever. Always with His good, working for you and working in you and working through you. That *Joy to the World* not be just a Christmas song.

So we do not despair when the demons seem to be winning, and we don't rejoice when we seem to be either. For our joy is in Jesus only. For our victory and life is only in Him. And always in Him.

Which means we rejoice when we finally get to the dining hall for there is our daily bread.

We rejoice when we get home because there are the people God has given us.

We rejoice in nasty Mike & Ike candies because in them we are laughing together.
And we even rejoice in the nasty nectarine, because God gave us someone willing to
actually pick it up and throw it away for us.
And in all these ways, we ARE rejoicing that our names are written in heaven and we are
forgiven. The joy of forgiveness. The joy of our life together. The joy of our Lord's gifts.
The joy of his life given to us.

That's why Jesus sent his disciples out ahead of Him - to give that joy.
The joy that satan and his demons will never know, for they have no joy. Ever.
But it is yours. Forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds
through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.