

God Rest Ye Merry

R6-19, May 26, 2019
Jn. 14:23-29

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*God rest ye merry, gentlemen and gentlewomen,
Let nothing you dismay.
Remember Christ our Savior
Was born on Christmas day,
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray;
O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy!
O tidings of comfort and joy!*

Devastating tornadoes, floods and fires,
gun violence,
famine, epidemics, poverty,
lingering wars,
government disruption,
money-bought elections,
trade wars and rising prices

there is much to despair and reasons aplenty to lose heart.

I sing a Christmas carol this day to remember *why* Christ came.

We don't sing *God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen*
much in church anymore, even at Christmas.

One reason is that it's difficult to make the lyrics gender-inclusive.

The greater reason though seems to be
that in a Christmas season of good cheer and happy greetings
we prefer to avoid the negativity of mentioning *why* Jesus was necessary.

Our Savior and Redeemer came with a mission
of wresting us from Satan's power,
of godly power and might vanquishing the allies of Satan,
of evil called-out and justice decreed.

At Christmas we prefer small, helpless babies in humble mangers,
friendly beasts to keep him warm,
and silent nights, holy nights where all is calm.

So I sing *God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen and Gentlewomen* this day in May
when the world has come loose at the seams,
nerves fray, and buttoned reason has come undone.

This old carol is a story of God's might interceding in our affairs.

Yet the language is old and words have different meanings now.

"God rest ye" once meant "God make you."

It is a blessing to us of God appearing in this world and acting to make us merry.

"God rest ye!" God establish thee! God remake ye merry!

"Merry" once meant great, strong, mighty.

Robin Hood's merry men were probably all good-humored,
but more so, the "merry men" were strong, mighty, swarthy and bold.

God blesses in this carol to make us strong and bold in this world of threats and terrors.

God blesses us to make us strong and bold
by giving us Jesus,
by sending a savior,
by appearing in our lifetime and interceding in history.

And so Jesus comforts his friends in our Gospel reading.

Jesus knows his time is coming to a close, the cross is looming closer.

Yet the mood of Jesus in the gospels

is not of sadness of leaving beloved friends
 or regrets at having so little time left.
 The mood of *the disciples*
 seems to be growing fear and unsettling confusion.
 But Jesus is calm and sure and resolute.
 Jesus explains what is to come.
 Jesus explains that he is going away and they cannot come,
 but *God* is in command,
God will carry through,
 God will send *an Advocate*, the Holy Spirit.

This word, “advocate,” “paraclete” in the original Greek,
 means literally “one who helps alongside someone,”
 and is translated as *advocate, defender, counselor,*
 sort of like *lawyer* or *assistant*.

The idea here is that God *does not do it for us*,
 but *assists with us* in managing this life and facing this world.
 From the first chapter of Genesis,
 we are created by God in order to take care of creation as God’s agents.
 Jesus redeems the world, reclaims it for God and makes it right.
 And now God turns creation back over to us and puts us in charge.
 But we can’t do it alone,
 God sends help,
 God sends the Holy Spirit of God
 to walk alongside of us, defend our blind side, and counsel our decisions.

We are not alone.
 We do not have to figure it out ourselves.

And so we see the present Holy Spirit walking with us in life.
 Just in my role as pastor in this church
 God surrounds me richly with a skilled, compassionate, faithful staff,
 who work together to serve God and this congregation,
 helpers alongside one another as God’s Holy Spirit.

But God blesses more than these.
 You may not know, but I depend on the advice
 of the church council and an Advisory Team,
 who work behind the scenes in ways you will never know
 so as to make good decisions and take the best action for this church.

And I have pastor colleagues outside of this congregation,
 local pastors meeting weekly,
 interim pastors meeting monthly,
 and synod staff I call on frequently,
 advising and encouraging.

This work I do
 is the product of many *Advocates* walking with me.

The power of the present Holy Spirit, the *Advocate* promised by Jesus
 appears in the friends and fellow believers
 who God gathers around us as a congregation.

We are so richly blessed so often
 that we are spared knowing how bad things could be.
 We are spared the loneliness and vulnerability of the friendless.
 I come across many individuals every week
 who have no friends and have no family that they can rely on.
 They are alone, friendless.
 They have no one to turn to, no one who cares.

Loners in this world exist only to survive.
 Relationships become utilitarian.
 Every decision is about "what's in it for me."
 Purpose has narrowed to a worldview of one.
 We are God's Holy Spirit,
 Advocates in this world for the loners and the friendless.
 We as church are God's Holy Spirit that walks alongside
 those struggling to make it.

Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church has many *Advocates*,
 those embodying God's Holy Spirit for others.
 I see it in the adults taking time to talk to our youth.
 I see it in confirmation mentors, Sunday school teachers and choir members.
 I see it in the fellowship of Bible studies and faith conversations.
 The Holy Spirit appears in so many acts of kindness and regard.
 This church is richly blessed with God's Holy Spirit,
 Advocates who are God's heart and hands.

People are created by God to be social beings.
 We are most human when in supportive, nurturing community.
Church is that community.
 This church exists to be *Advocates* for one another.

Comfort and joy is the Christ message
 amidst headlines of bombings, violence, pestilence and war.
 Not simple good wishes
 but God's *Holy Spirit* acting through us to bless, defend, counsel and comfort.
 We are not alone.
 God is with us still, appearing in the faces of friends.

*Now to the Lord sing praises,
 All you within this place,
 And with true love and brotherhood
 Each other now embrace;
 This holy tide of Christmas
 All others doth deface.
 O tidings of comfort and joy,
 Comfort and joy;
 O tidings of comfort and joy!*