

“May Your Eagerness Be Matched”

Psalm 100; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – June 27, 2021

Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we might be empowered by your Spirit to live into your call to us today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Do you suppose it's possible to be enthusiastic and tentative at the same time? I think most of us are probably pretty excited to be back in this room together, but it seems likely there are a lot of other emotions under the surface too. On the one hand, the exuberant praise we hear in Psalm 100 speaks to the moment. We've "come to this place with a song" and it feels so good! This year has reminded us that we are God's people, and that God is faithful. Joyful thanksgiving is the order of the day.

On the other hand – as we prepare to install our lay leaders for the new ministry year, as we all prepare to be back in this space, to "work side by side" as the song goes – we may well need the encouragement and challenge Paul offers in the verses we heard from Second Corinthians. Paul is writing to the church at Corinth to appeal to them to contribute to any offering – a love gift, if you will – for the church in Jerusalem. Earlier in the chapter, he even goads them to a little friendly competition with the church in Macedonia to see who can be more generous. It's been going on a while, this collection, having kicked off sometime the year before. Now it's time for a strong finish, Paul tells them.

This phrase he uses seems to me to translate to our situation, even though our circumstances are far removed. “Now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means.” We are excited to be back together. We are rejoicing to be church again, together in each other’s presence, gathered here in this sacred space. But showing up is just the first step. Next we actually have to be church – singing, praying, learning, planning, serving, sharing – all the things that go into faithfully living out the gospel here in this time and place.

This is just the first day, and we don’t have to do it all at once. Putting all the pieces back together may feel overwhelming. But there’s some more good news tucked into Paul’s words and reflected in Psalm 100 too. “If the eagerness is there,” Paul writes, “the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have.” We come into this place with singing, not because we have triumphed over a pandemic, but because God has brought us through. We are God’s people, and the sheep of God’s pasture. God is not asking anything of us we are not capable of, because it’s by God’s power that we, as church, accomplish anything. You’re not being asked to do anything you can’t do. You’re being asked to do what you can do, with joy and gladness. When you have abundance, God uses it to meet others’ need. When you have need, God will provide, as others share from their abundance. This is the essence of God’s economy, when it comes to offerings, and when it comes to the work that makes a congregation function.

I want us to remember this day. There may be some temptation to block all the unpleasantness of the past year out of our memories. There is some evidence that shows this was one response to the Flu Epidemic of 1918. But let us work to remember what it feels like to be back together again, after more than a year of separation, isolation, loneliness, anxiety, and suffering. Let us remember this day. Let us remember our enthusiasm, our eagerness, our joy at entering into the house of God with singing and praise. Because that enthusiasm is what needs to fuel what comes next. We need to live out our testimonies now, bearing witness to how God sustained us through hard times – not just as individuals, but as a congregation. Let our eagerness be matched, as Paul suggests, by living up to the promise of this great day of reunion.

It's okay if our enthusiasm is tempered by tentativeness. It's okay to go slow. It's okay to remember gradually all that we are capable of. It's okay to dream a bit first and then see what's possible. The thing is just not to get stuck. I keep coming back to this “body of Christ just released from a body cast” metaphor. We are about to enter the physical therapy stage. And you know that physical therapy is work, right? It requires lots of breaks and time for rest, but it also requires dedication and diligence. It may feel repetitive. It may even hurt. But it's what will make us stronger again. It's how we can match our eagerness about being here today with fruits that reflect the promises God has made to us.

I am so glad that you are here. I am grateful to each and every one of you for showing up, including all of you joining us on Zoom. I am overjoyed to be able to make a joyful noise with you. I am thrilled to be remembering how we do this with you. There will, no doubt, be some mis-steps, but let's just laugh together and keep going! There is room here for all the emotions we may experience today. But the Holy Spirit is present, my friends, so you know things are going to keep getting stirred up. I am delighted that we can install so many of you into leadership positions. I am awed by your willingness to say Yes to the responsibilities that hold this congregation together. Just remember: no one, including God, is asking you to do things you can't do. You might be asked to do things you didn't know you can do, but if you are, it's because God is equipping you for exactly that work. We are God's people, and the sheep of God's pasture. Let us give thanks and bless God's holy name. Hallelujah and Amen!