

6th Sunday of Easter ~ May 13, 2007

Let All the Peoples Praise God by Rev. Donald Paige and Rev. Susan Morrison

Psalm 67:3

Let all the peoples praise you.

John 14: 23 – 29

Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from God who sent me.

²⁵“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom God will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

²⁸You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to my Father, because my Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

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The second lesson this morning gives all the peoples yet another reason to praise their God. The lesson begins where we left off last week with Jesus reiterating his “new” commandment about loving one another. In this morning’s lesson Jesus promises that he and God will always love those who love one another. In fact, he and God will make their *home* with those who live Christ’s love. What a lovely image. God and Jesus making their home within each one of us. How comforting. How reassuring. Let all the peoples praise God for this gift.

And Jesus continues to assure us of their “home dwelling” when he promises that even after his departure from this earth, God will not forsake us. God will send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit who will be with us forever, making its home within us also.

God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It’s the Trinity. And we, as a congregation, are blessed to bear that name. Holy Trinity United Methodist Church. Surely it is here, within us, that God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit have also made their home. Let all the peoples praise God!

And then, Jesus gives us his peace. “My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid.” How comforting. How reassuring. There’s an old Baptist hymn that sings forth this promise. “I have the peace that passeth understanding down in my heart....down in my heart today.”

Peace. Peace. Especially on this Sunday when we dedicate the restored Bell Tower, this promise of peace from Jesus literally rings forth a message to those who have made this day possible, for it is my hope that the ringing of the bells will bring peace to the family and friends of Matt Graham, and to Bill Eaton’s family, and to those who loved Robert Woods.

For over a year and a half, Matt’s mom, Carlene, and Matt’s brothers and dad and all of his friends, have struggled with their grief over the death of Matt at the young age of 31. Their efforts to memorialize Matt have been amazing. I will never forget the incredible presentation of Matt’s life over a year ago at the March 17th fundraiser in Salem. It captured the heart and soul of Matt Graham. Chad and Kim, Todd and Tammy, Evelyn, Laurie, Shannon, Angie and everyone else who made that night possible, thank you.

Because of your efforts and your love for Matt, finally, on this day, the bells at Holy Trinity ring once again. I find it so God-cidental, that like Rev. Paige, who went door to door among the merchants in town to raise money for the original bell, you, too, went to all of the merchants in town, leaving collection boxes so that “the bells at Holy Trinity could ring in memory of Matt Graham.”

I pray that the ringing of the bells this morning brings you peace. Peace of mind. Peace of heart. The peace that only God can give because it is not of this world. Your vision, your dream, your hopes, your intentions have been realized and with it, I pray that you might have “the peace that passeth understanding down in your heart”

I pray that the same gift of peace will be realized by Bill Eaton’s beloved family. Thank you, Bruce and Cindy Hayden, for your vision. Without your generosity, and the generosity of many of Bill’s relatives through the sharing of his estate with Holy Trinity, the bells would not be ringing on this day. For many, many years, Bill and Gladys Eaton were devoted members of this congregation and I know that they would be so thrilled to see and hear the restoration of the bells. Their spirits join ours today in praising God. Let all the peoples praise God!

May the beautiful landscaping around the Bell Tower bring God’s peace to the Woods family. It is so tragic when a beloved, young son dies in an accident. But may the ringing of the bells be a reminder of the peace of Christ that passes all understanding.

And to all of you, who, over these many years, gave gifts and memorial gifts to the Bell Tower Fund in honor and memory of loved ones, may the ringing of the bells give you peace. I think most recently of the McIlvin family, who asked that all of the memorial monies in memory of Ellie be put toward the Bell Tower Fund. May they and all of you know that your loved one is with God, finding an eternal home in the light and love of Jesus Christ.

May everyone – each of us, and even the stranger who is passing by – may everyone who hears the tolling of the bells at Holy Trinity know peace. May their tones remind us individually that “*I* have the peace that passeth understanding down in *my* heart.....down in my heart today.” And may we, as God’s people, rejoice and give thanks because “*We* have the peace that passeth understanding down in *our* hearts...to stay.”

Let all the peoples praise God. Alleluia. Amen.