



President Walton's July 2019 Message

Full of the Joy of Jesus



About 1907 Henry van Dyke, 19th Century clergyman, poet, and educator, wrote a poem as he gazed on the Berkshire Mountains. We know the words best as “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee,” hymn 803 in the Lutheran Service Book. Professor van Dyke, who was preaching at Williams College in Williamstown, MA, wrote it as a poem and gave it to the College President. As van Dyke handed it to him he said, “Here is a hymn for you. Your mountains were my inspiration. It must be sung to the music of Beethoven’s ‘Hymn to Joy.’” The hymn appeared in the 3rd edition of Van Dyke’s Book of Poems in 1911.

The hymn was indeed set to Beethoven’s Ode to Joy, part of his 9th and final symphony. What makes it so amazing, beyond the exuberant beauty of the piece, is that Beethoven was totally deaf. In fact, at the premier in 1824 the soloist had to turn the great man around to acknowledge the thunderous standing ovation, which he could not hear.

Here’s my point. Joy is not something dictated by our emotions. It is a quality grounded upon God Himself, and His promises, and is derived from Him. The Psalmist, in Psalm 16:11, writes, **“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”** The Apostle Paul writing to the people in Rome, says, **“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”** (Ro 15:13).

Paul also identifies joy as one of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5. It isn’t dependent on circumstances but is actually a result of choice. It is more a state of *being* for the Christian, given by the Holy Spirit. This is why the Apostle Peter could write to the scattered Christians, **“Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible...”** (1 Peter 1:8). Joy, for the Christian, comes on account of what Jesus has done for us by dying on the cross for our sins, and rising to give us new life. Perhaps this is why we express such vigorous joy in our Easter celebrations!

God’s call on believers is to be filled with joy! In Nehemiah 8:10 we are reminded, **“the joy of the Lord is your strength.”** When we live in His joy there is a strength which will often stretch us, but will never break us down. Like fireworks on the 4th of July, Jesus fills us with joy that is to be seen! As we share His joy by simply letting it flow through us many can be impacted. Studies show a joyful attitude breeds joy! Try it!



We have two joyful events coming up this month. First, the LCMS National Youth Gathering (NYG) will take place July 11-15, 2019, in Minneapolis, and events will be held at the Minneapolis Convention Center and U.S. Bank Stadium under the theme “REAL. PRESENT. GOD.” The Florida-Georgia District will have over 600 youth and chaperones participating in this gathering of over 20,000. If you’ve ever been to a mass event at the NYG you get a sense of the fullness of joy! Seeing all these youths gathered in one place, unreservedly praising Jesus, is awe-inspiring and gives me a sense of hope for the future of the Church.

As we continue our quest to start two new ministries in each region, each year for the next four years, we need to focus additional attention on how we can strengthen and support our youth and young adults. They struggle to navigate a sin-filled world with all kinds of distractions and messages that have led many from the faith. Working together we can we let Jesus be seen in 2019 to our youth and young adults so that they stay engaged as disciples of Jesus! What they see in our life of faith, the joy they sense we derive from our relationship with Jesus, is tantamount to how they will live out their faith in joy! At the National Youth Gathering we have a very special District event planned at the Hyundai Room at the Minneapolis Center to not only entertain and feed our youth, which we will do in an ample way with State Fair food, but it is also an opportunity to remind them of God’s call through Jesus on each of their lives. It will indeed be a time filled with joy!

The very next week, July 20-25, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will hold their 67th Regular Convention at the Tampa Convention Center in Tampa, Florida. This is an historic event in many ways, including that this is the first time ever that the Florida-Georgia District has hosted a Synod Convention. **This is an honor which brings great joy!** The theme for the Synod Convention is “Joy:Fully Lutheran, Rejoice. Pray. Give Thanks” and is taken from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, where Paul writes, “**Rejoice** always, **pray** without ceasing, give **thanks** in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Paul’s instruction here was to encourage Christians who were living in difficult days. Some might say that these days not unlike our own, where Christianity is often looked down on and Christians are often marginalized. In spite of the difficulties then and now, we are called to make a choice to rejoice, pray and give thanks, knowing all that Jesus has done for us, and knowing He will empower our choice. We can indeed rejoice, pray and give thanks! This is God’s will for us, not just when we’re in a church service or when we are feeling good about our faith, but all the time.

We are filled with joy, and we are fully Lutheran. This is a wonderful way for us to express our faithful confession. We have sound doctrine, we stand fully upon the Word of God, and we gratefully celebrate the Sacraments, knowing that these means of grace are indeed gifts of God to His people. Undeserving as we are, He continues to pour out His lavish love on us as we gather around the Word and Sacrament to be built up so that we can go out into the world and connect people to Jesus. We are grace alone, Scripture alone, Faith alone Christians who love Jesus and want others to know and love Him too!

When our faith is lived out and the joy of Jesus is seen in us, it impacts those around us. The Holy Spirit can use that to connect people to Jesus. As several thousand gather in Tampa for the convention we will have an awesome opportunity to impact the community when we live as joyful Lutherans. It is my hope and prayer that we will be generous in how we treat each other, but also in how we treat those who will be serving us, whether in the hotels, the convention center, the restaurants or wherever we happen to be. May they say of our Church denomination that people experienced the joy of our faith as it was displayed in us. By the way, that’s not just something for people who are going as delegates to the convention. It is something for each of us, no matter where we are, to keep in mind. We represent Jesus, the very One who represented each of us, and died in our place on the Cross. Now He calls us to live in joy as we share the good news with the world around us! What a great privilege!

Paul wrote to the Philippian Church, saying, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." May this be our goal, knowing His joy is our strength, and we can be Joy:fully Lutherans because of the One who gives us joy, our precious Lord Jesus! Let's show the world our faith by simply living it out on a daily basis, recognizing all the joyful events God gives to us. Amen? Then Jesus will indeed be seen in 2019!



In His joy,

Greg



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UPCOMING EVENTS:

- [70th Anniversary Challenge](#)
- [National Youth Gathering](#)
- [LCMS Synod Convention](#)
- [Volunteer Opportunities at the Synod Convention](#)
- [Pastors Conference - Sept. 23-25](#)
- [Educators Conference - Sept 25 - 27](#)