

Paraphrasing our Psalm today, Psalm 100, we are instructed to, “Be joyful in the Lord... [especially when we worship] [no matter what].”

My favorite comedian, Eddie Izzard, alleges that we Christians of the Anglican variety don’t express our joy in the Lord very well, especially when we worship. He makes fun of our singing this way:

“Hallelujah [singing slowly and mournfully].

Hallelujah.

Joyfully we laugh about.”

Now, obviously, Eddie doesn’t worship here at Church of the Resurrection. If he did, he would know that not all Anglicans sing joylessly. But he DOES have a point. When compared with the three “ministry partner” congregations who worship here after us each Sunday, for instance, our singing is rather... stately and cerebral. Slow; definitely slow. And quiet.

If the psalmist for today had his way, though, we would put aside all restraint and literally belt out the song, literally shout for joy in thanks to God. That what our psalm says to do, “Shout for joy to the Lord!”

I am told that the Hebrew word used here for “shout” was most commonly used to describe how the people would greet their king when he returned victorious from battle. A messenger would bring word that the king was coming and that his army had won. So, the people would line the street and shout and cheer when the king appeared. THIS is the kind of energy with which we are to praise God when we recall all that God has done, is doing, and will do for us.

A lot of people over the years have told me, “We Episcopalians don’t shout.” Some of them have even added, “That’s why I’m an Episcopalian!” I’ve noticed, though, that some of these very same people are very publicly enthusiastic over other things: their sports team, a rock star, or even the performance of their stock portfolio.

A priest I know of another denomination shared his utter amazement about being at a football game when the man who was energetically leading the cheering in his section of the stands turned out to be his dourest parishioner. “I had never seen this man crack a smile,” the priest said in great wonder, “and here he was turning the whole stadium in a spontaneous pep rally.”



Sports do seem to kindle a lot of our joy. I remember, for instance, way (way) back when our local professional football team won the Super Bowl. People lined the streets to greet the team upon its return to town just as if the football players were conquering kings. They shouted and cheered in public and threw confetti.



Psalm 100, our psalm for today's Christ the King observation, was a "song of enthronement." The idea here is that the Lord God is king of all nations and king of all people. King of Russia. King of Isis. King of Israel and Syria. King of North AND South Korea. Even king of these United States of America.

What this means is that God has everything under control. Even if we don't "see" how. Even if we don't like what we see. The idea here is that God is bigger than the nations of the world. God is bigger than our problems. And that we owe God our "king" our allegiance and thanks and praise. No matter what.

The ancient Israelites thought of God as king enthroned not in heaven, but with a seat here on earth in the Temple in Jerusalem. So, a call on the people to come before God's presence was a call to worship. And this psalm, Psalm 100, emphasizes how we are to worship: "With thanksgiving... with praise..." No matter what.

I've been following the news in our country and abroad, and there is much to fear. Even in our church, there is much to fear. And there are a whole lot of other ways our joy can be dampened. But HERE is where I find my joy: "The Lord himself is God; he himself has made us, and we are his." And the only response that makes sense to me is to worship God joyfully and thankfully. No matter what.

"Serve the Lord with gladness." No matter what.

One of the most difficult things I have had to do as a priest was to preside over Ric Molen's funeral. Many of you knew Ric, a relatively young homeless man who was our Crucifer and Junior Warden, as devout a Christian as you will ever meet. And the day of Ric's funeral I learned that we can come before the Lord's presence with a song even though we grieve! Not just any old song, either, any old Eddie Izzard dirge, but a song of praise, a song of THANKSGIVING to the Lord our God, in this case for Ric and his life.

I did the only thing I knew to do: I asked the Lord to help. “Lord, help me to give you thanks and praise for Ric’s life, even though I am grieving his death. Because YOU, the LORD, are God. You know why Ric has died, even if I do not. And, all things considered, even a little bit of life is downright stupendously awesome. Thank you, Lord, for Ric.”

And do you know what happened? I was given a song in my grieving heart, a song I already knew. Maybe you know this song, too; it’s called *Blessed Assurance*:

“This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my Savior all the day long;  
“Perfect submission, perfect delight,  
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;  
Angels, descending, bring from above  
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.”