

1 Peter 4:12-14 & 5:6-11
John 17:1-11

JUBILANT WITH JOY

As we have seen these past few weeks,
God is our daily bread, the bread of Life;
God is our faithful, immoveable Rock;
and we are blessed every single day with God's steadfast love.
Today we will look at God as the source of all joy.

Peter's letter is chilling, isn't it?

He tells his readers—and that mean us, too—to not be surprised
at the “fiery ordeal” happening among us as a test.

In fact, he turns it around to encourage us to *rejoice*
because it means we are sharing Christ's sufferings.

Indeed the time will come when we will “be glad and shout for joy
when his glory is revealed.”

Still more, if we find ourselves attacked, insulted, even scorned
for promoting the name of our Lord Jesus,
we will actually be blessed!

He says that the “spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God” rests on us.

We shine a reflection of that glory for all to see if they are discerning.

He cautions all believers to humble ourselves “under the mighty hand
of God” with the promise that God will exalt us at the right time.

Remember that Jesus taught that the arrogant would be brought low
and the humble would be exalted.

Our suffering will not last forever—just as he did for Job,
God will restore, strengthen and support us.

It's very timely to be thinking about the intense ordeal of testing
that leads us to eventually find joy in sharing Christ's sufferings.

We are confined in our homes, quarantined for our own sakes,
dealing with imposed rules about “social distancing” and
the requirement to wear a mask if we do go out.

We are often grilled with questions about our current health
and possible recent exposure to the Corona virus.

We turn our attention to the Lord, thanking him for his protection,
his healing, his comfort and his encouragement,
allowing us to relax our fears and instead to embrace
our loving fellowship.

Peter's passing reference to our enemy, the devil,
as a roaring lion looking to catch a meal reminded me of **The Lion King**,
which I saw recently.

The king (Mustafa)'s evil brother Scar does everything he can
with what little power he has to take down the king by devious means.

Scar resorts to gathering and leading all the nasty hyenas
as his henchmen to separate the king from his supporters,
to isolate and then kill him.

Scar then declares himself the lion king,
and nearly destroys the kingdom until the true king's son
is called out of his self-exile to save the land
and all its loyal residents.

Health and welfare return.

Joy is restored.

Wess Stafford wrote, “Joy is a decision, a really brave one, about how you are going to respond to life.”

Our faith keeps us rooted in joy, celebrating all God has done and is doing for us.

In our reading from John we hear Jesus’ last talk with God the Father, in the presence and full hearing of the disciples, before leaving them.

He asks God to glorify his Son so that in turn the Son may glorify the Father.

He speaks of the ways he has already glorified God by completing the work God sent him to earth to accomplish.

Jesus asks special blessings for all faithful believers, those God gave to him, and to whom he gave God’s word.

Above all he asks God to protect the believers—

“all mine are yours and all yours are mine”—

in God’s Son’s holy name.

He specifies the reason: “so they may be one, as we are one.”

Elsewhere he told the people that he is in them and they are in him.

This is a holy relationship!

There is great joy in being God’s blessed child.

But it didn’t just happen to the believers.

They had to listen to Jesus teach, they had to be willing to believe in him as their Lord and Savior, and to follow in his ways.

As Henri Nouwen wrote, “Joy does not simply happen to us.

We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day.”

And this is true about faith, as well.

Let us pray:

Wherever we are, Lord,

We know we are together, united in faithful prayer.

We thank you, we glorify you, we worship you,

and we count on you, especially during these devastating times,

to bless us with continuing faith and health.

You are our Rock and our Redeemer.

You sustain us with your never-ending love.

You encourage us to express with jubilant joy our love for you.

In your precious name we pray,

Amen.