



Sermon Transcript

Something Worth Singing About

James 2:1-7 and 14-17 | Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost | September 8, 2024 | John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

Singing brings us together.

The right song can affect our mood and unify us in difficult times.

Fred and JD, we've invited you to join us for worship at the beginning of the school year again. This is the 4th time (picture of JD). Why? Because when you sing, we sing with you. When I hear Peace like a River, I always remember when you sang it the first time you came here.

In a few weeks, we'll gather for the funeral of long-time member, Marilyn Jeukens (picture of Marilyn). Marilyn LOVED singing.

During Covid, Marilyn moved to the memory unit at Amira in downtown Forest Lake. Yet, every time I come over to lead the monthly service, Marilyn would have her old Faith Lutheran nametag on and was ready to sing.

Even though Marilyn and her new friends had difficulty remembering things, once I'd start an acapella version of Jesus Loves Me or Amazing Grace, recall would kick in. They knew all the words and belted out the chorus with gusto.

Singing matters.

In 2018 there were significant wildfires in California. 17 volunteers arrived to help the cause. From American Samoa.

There's something unique about these firefighters. I bet you'll never guess, but when they are at work... they do this.

(VIDEO)

... "take it to the LORD in prayer". That should be a familiar song, especially following the children's message today.

Why were they singing?

One of the firefighters (FIREFIGHTER) said "we try and stay positive. A lot of people tell us they've never seen a fire team so positive.

Each day ends back at camp with an inspirational anthem.

"It's a church song and it's just part of our culture. Our belief in God is very strong."

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Singing is one way to bring our voices together in praise of Jesus. Singing is our prayer, a tune that we carry in our hearts and that we bring to life through the Spirit.

Singing crosses boundaries and barriers—it's something we all can do, across all ability levels.

Singing is Biblical—from the stories of Miriam crossing the Dead Sea after escaping the Egyptians to King David, known for his many songs written in the book of Psalms.

Some stories in the Bible even get people telling the story of Jesus in ways that change the world.

James, the half brother of Jesus, is someone that's played an instrumental role in the early church after Jesus has ascended to heaven.

James writes a letter that appears to be very critical—that faith without works is dead!

What does he mean by that?

There is some theological debate that Martin Luther wanted the book of James taken out of the Bible. However, Luther does lift up that James promotes the law of God.

Luther believed that we are not saved by our works—but that because of our faith, they are a natural byproduct of the love of Christ in our hearts. Our works should come flowing out of like the words to our favorite hymn—we don't even have to think about it, it's just who we are.

Yet James has some interesting things to say.

If we see two people, one is dressed up and looks really important, and the other is poor and wearing dirty cloths, and you show partiality to the one in nice clothes and disregard the one in rags, we aren't showing glory to Jesus.

If a brother or a sister is naked and lacks food and we say “go in peace, keep warm and eat”—it's like the modern equivalent of saying “thoughts and prayers.”

What used to be a genuine response to someone in grief or crisis has been repeated so often, especially following school shootings like the one in Georgia this week, that the phrase rings hollow.

“Go in peace” or “Thoughts and prayers” without action—without compassion—without heart—is just words.

If anyone should understand this, it's James.

He's seen Jesus get caught in his own “thoughts and prayers” moment with the Syrophenician woman in Tyre.

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He tries to dismiss her—essentially that she’s like a dog begging for scraps. She isn’t having it. She stands up for herself for the sake of her daughter.

Why is Jesus like this? Trust me, there’s plenty of opinions on this response too. Is he being rude? Is it a cultural thing? It doesn’t REALLY matter to me.

Because what DOES matter is what happens next.

When she says that even the dogs eat the crumbs—this is a reminder that the bigness of God’s kingdom goes beyond the chosen people.

Jesus is not on this earth just for the chosen people. He’s here for everyone. Even this woman, a foreigner who Jesus shouldn’t be talking to per the customs of the day, understands that if Jesus is able to heal, what is to prevent him from healing a gentile?

This is a pivotal moment because everything changes.

Jesus heals the daughter, sight unseen. Then, instead of returning to the comforts of Galilee, Jesus keeps heading further away (MAP with Sidon).

He goes to Sidon and heals a man who is deaf and unable to speak.

What happens after this? Jesus tells everyone to be quiet. Don’t say anything.

Do people listen?

Absolutely not. They proclaim it. They sing the good news. Just like he’s healed the man and his mouth is opened, so too are the witnesses—their mouths are opens and how can they keep from singing?

How can WE keep from singing?

We have so much to be joy-filled about. We have many blessings to thank God for.

Yet, in the spirit of James, what are we doing about it?

Faith Lutheran is a leader in this community. We’ve stepped into huge projects for housing, feeding, and clothing neighbors who are unsheltered.

What’s next? How will you step into leadership, especially as Faith takes on hosting a Point in Time Count for the county this winter. Where else is God leading us?

In the past, Faith sponsored a MOPS program—Mothers of Preschoolers. For years, Faith has hosted a Father Daughter Ball. During Covid, the momentum on these groups stopped.

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These ministries are about relationships—bringing people together for the sake of Christ. It takes more than one person to resurrect these opportunities—but it won't take much—and there will be people to help you.

And Faith has always cared about our youth. It's in our DNA—a congregation with many teachers and educators. How will Faith lead into the future?

Could Faith set aside intentional time for families to gather a few times a month to serve together? Would someone step into a facilitator role—to help put outings on the calendar and energize us to serve as a people of God across all ages? Can we do something new?

Where is God calling YOU?

I ask a lot of questions today... and I don't have specific answers. But when I've put out challenges like this in the past, I'm amazed at the direction the Holy Spirit takes us. If something is stirring, reach out to me.

I'm not looking for one person to do all the things. We're looking for many people to collectively do a few things that bring joy.

As Luther Sem professor Karoline Lewis recently said, "Part of discipleship with Jesus is voicing our praise aloud and recognizing, "Our God is here!"

We take that to the Lord in prayer. That's definitely something worth singing about. Amen.