

Lent Devotional April 16, 2025

Scripture

Philippians 4:1-13

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

10 I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. 11 Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. 12 I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Devotion

The Rev. Rebecca Hickok '93

Well. My head's all over the place with this. It's Wednesday of Holy Week. Holy Week. You know, "Tis Midnight and On Olive's Brow." Not "Ode to Joy." Who in the name of the sweet baby Jesus picked these readings? Look up "clueless" in the dictionary and I think you'll find a picture of the culprit.

But. Hmmm. Wednesday of Holy Week. Day before the Big Day. Passover. If I were a first century Jewish woman, what would I be doing that day? Same thing I do now as a Christian woman before a big holy day, I expect. Shopping, cooking, cleaning, anticipating the arrival of family, and singing. Joyfully. My family will be here, all in one place all around one table, all remembering and celebrating the grand story of Exodus, holding the empire at bay for one day. And I know what I wouldn't be doing. Listening to the news. I'd be way too busy to hear the argle-bargle about the troublesome itinerant preacher who was giving the Romans and Herod a run for their money. Good on him if he was, but I have potatoes to peel and beds to get ready.

So let's not do that thing we do. Putting 21st century expectations on our first century ancestors and getting our knickers all in a knot because they're singing for full-throated joy in the midst of our Holy Week.

Because, honestly, I'll take any glimmer of joy I can get any time I can. This day, April 16, marks seven months to the day that my husband of 30 years died. So, when I read this passage some clueless genius

picked for today, it makes me want to – if not sing – maybe hum softly – at the possibilities for the healing balm of joy.

So, whether you are a first century woman just trying to bring joy into her family circle in a place where life was hard and the Romans were harder or a 21st century woman searching through the darkness for that one spark that gives you the wherewithal to carry on: we cling to the words of Paul, who was no stranger to hard times either:

Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am.

Prayer

Sweet, loving God, sometimes joy and sorrow course through us at the same time, and we're not at all sure what to do. Help us to embrace both. Amen.