

PENTECOST: IN FAITH WE RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 28)

November 18, 2007

Malachi 4:1-2a

Psalm 98

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Luke 21:5-19

Joy to the world?

In a few weeks, Christians will begin preparing for the birth of the Savior. Cantatas and other musical offerings will resound in many churches throughout the Advent/Christmas season; worshipers will lift their voices in singing familiar hymns, and among them is sure to be the beloved carol, “Joy to the World.” Yet we live in a time when many are hard pressed to find joy in the world. With the ever-present threat of terrorism, nations at war and/or experiencing civil unrest, the occurrence of natural disasters, and newspapers reporting acts of violence on a daily basis, many are wondering if the twenty-first century may be the last.

It is believed that Psalm 98 served as the inspiration for Isaac Watts’ (1674-1748) lyrics for “Joy to the World.” The concluding verse in the psalm reminds us that God will be honest and fair in judging everyone on the earth – an assurance that is reflected in the fourth stanza of the hymn. God “rules the world with truth and grace,” and Psalm 98 praises the LORD as King of the universe. God is in control.

This, too, is Jesus’ message to his followers. Despite global unrest, natural disasters, and widespread famine and disease, Jesus says, “don’t worry;” those who are faithful to him will be saved (Luke 21:18, 19). The gospel text for this week is set within the context of Jesus’ apocalyptic, future-oriented discourse with his disciples. Within a few days Jesus will be arrested and put to death. While in Jerusalem, his words to the disciples are designed to prepare them for what they will face because of their faithfulness.

Destruction, persecution, and redemption form the outline for the entire discourse unit (Luke 21:5-38). Jesus prophesies about the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem itself (21:5, 6, 20-24), the persecution of the disciples (21:12-19), and his coming again at the end of time (21:25-36) when the faithful will “be set free” (21:28, *CEV*). But before the end, Jesus says, the distressing times are occasion for the faithful to tell about their faith (21:13). It is a time to witness boldly in the face of “all sorts of frightening things” (21:11b, *CEV*). It is a time to proclaim, “Joy to the world!”

A number of years ago I was a member of a small inner-city church that worshiped in a storefront facility – a humble building where children’s art adorned the front windows

and where “stain-glassed windows” along the interior walls were works of art by one of the members. The faithful gathered for worship each Sunday. During the week, volunteers dispensed clothing and bread to people in the community. Children stopped by after school and found a safe haven. The worship space moved beyond the walls and into the surrounding mission field as a way to proclaim “Joy to the world!”

The prophet Malachi reminds us that “the day of judgment is certain to come” (4:1a, *CEV*). But until that day, we are called to witness in Jesus’ name. The apostle Paul admonishes us to “never become tired of doing right” (2 Thessalonians 3:13, *CEV*). And the Son of Man will be pleased (Luke 21:36). Joy to the world! The Lord is come! Amen!

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, who serves at the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of Bible Societies Service Centers in:
Europe-Middle East – With prayers for God’s guidance in advising and encouraging Bible Societies in the process of implementing Funding Reform, and that wisdom, unity, and cooperation will permeate the work, and with prayers for God’s protection for all staff members who travel; **Asia-Pacific** – With prayers for wisdom, insight, skill and direction, and for the safety for staff who travel and for their families left at home; **Africa** – With thanks to God for the progress made so far in implementing Epicor, Budget Maestro and Funding Reform, and with prayers for dynamic and visionary leadership at all levels in Africa, for the HIV/AIDS Desk and its new manager, for projects which aim to combat illiteracy, and that Bible Societies will take a lead in tackling violence, corruption and poor governance; **Americas** – With prayers for God’s continued blessing on translation projects, such as Scriptures for the hearing impaired, for the expansion of service to the churches and the successful continuation of the *O-21 Final Phase*; **World Service Center** – With thanks to God for the blessing of being called to serve the United Bible Societies, and with prayers for unity in mission in spreading the Scriptures throughout the world, and with prayers that God grant wisdom and strength to the Global Board and the General Secretary in their leadership.

Activity Corner: “Signs of Joy”

Supplies needed: Bible; construction paper, markers; pens/pencils; stickers (optional)

Invite members of your household to prepare messages of joy for people in your community who are homebound, hospitalized, or in nursing homes. Fold a sheet of 8-1/2” x 11” construction paper in half so that it measures 5-1/2” x 8-1/2.” On the front, write “Joy to the World!” and decorate the cover with stickers or self-created drawings. On the inside write a message of encouragement for the recipient. Include a verse from Psalm 98 (i.e., verse 1 or 4). Conclude by reading together Psalm 98 and singing “Joy to the world, the Lord is come!”