Devotional Reflection, Tuesday, August 11, 2026
Proper 14, week of the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Joining in God's Joy

Key phrases for reflection from today's Gospel reading:
29He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. 30He must increase, but I must decrease.'

You will find the full text of today's Gospel at the end of this reflection.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings (*BCP*, 979)
AM Psalm 97, 99, [100]; PM Psalm 94, [95]
Judges 13:1-15; Acts 5:27-42; John 3:22-36

Today we celebrate the Feast of . (See below.)

David's Reflections

Beethoven based his 9th. symphony on lines from Schiller's "Ode to Joy.' Our hymn, "Joyful, joyful, we adore thee," is sung to a tune from that symphony.
Joy! A spark of fire from heaven,
Daughter from Elysium,
Drunk with fire we dare to enter,
Holy One, inside your shrine.
Your magic power binds together,
What we by custom wrench apart,
All men will emerge as brothers,
Where you rest your gentle wings. *

In John's Gospel, John the Baptist sees himself as the friend of the bridegroom, like the "best man," who takes total delight in stepping back to make room for the bridegroom and in watching him and the bride come together in marriage. (see v. 29 above.) Jesus is the bridegroom and Israel the bride. In this,

John's last recorded witness to Jesus, we get a window into what drove him to preach and to withstand the criticisms of his opponents—the joy of participating in the bringing together of Jesus and his beloved people. He found a spot under God's gentle wings, to allude to Beethoven.

This verse in today's reading sprouts a collage of images in my mind's eye. I see the faces of people who responded to my invitation or to that of others to consider faith in Christ, made their commitment, and received Christian baptism and Holy Communion. I see the faces of infants and children receiving the anointing with oil after Holy Baptism. I see the faces of people who had dropped out of the worship life of the church and had returned, receiving Holy Communion and finding love in community for the first time in years. I see those new to the Episcopal Church from other communions savoring the richness of the worship and the tradition.

Words do not suffice to verbalize the joy such images evoke in the moment and in memory. No better motive exists for risking rejection and embarrassment in the service of bringing people into living contact with God's love and the love of a caring community. Who would not want to find a joyful spot under God's gentle wings and invite others into that spot?

Luke 15 records three parties, a shepherd celebrating the finding of a lost sheep, a woman celebrating the recovery of a precious coin, and a father jubilant over the return of a younger son. After the first parable,Jesus says, "there shall be more joy in heaven (in God) over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." After the second, "there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." During the father's celebration, he chides an unhappy brother by saying, "We had to celebrate and be glad, because your brother was dead and he lives, was lost and he has been found." (Luke 15:7, 10, 32). What a window into the divine ecstasy over those who come home to God's love, an ecstasy we are invited to share.

If there were no afterlife or if there were no risk of anyone being alienated from God eternally, the risks of sharing would be worth it for the sheer joy of knowing that others will have God's love and forgiveness active in their lives so long as they live. People starve emotionally and spiritually apart from God and from

loving community. So much of the striving for wealth, pleasure, power, and connection evidences just how deeply and pervasively that craving works in the human soul. That striving reveals that the strivers have not found a spot under god's gentle wings.

For the sheer joy of being friend of the bridegroom, who might we begin praying for? Who might we begin investing in emotionally and relationally? What better way to express our belief in the importance of friendship and relationship than to begin paying attention to the spiritual hungers of those we know and love and of beginning to find ways to invite them to the wedding?

Schiller's lines bespeak John's joy. John's question to us, were he here, might be something like "Don't you want to share this joy?" We might add that the Creator may also be found in our hearts, seeking to answer our hunger for reality and pouring out divine joy through the Spirit. (See Romans 14:16, "the kingdom of God . . . . is righteous and peace and joy in he Holy Spirit.")

We can celebrate and rejoice in sharing John's hope and in sharing our witness to that hope. To paraphrase Schiller, "All will emerge as brothers and sisters where you rest your gentle wings." * If God celebrates and takes joy in every persons' coming home to love, we can dance in that joy as it bubbles up within us.

* Friedrich von Schiller: Ode "An die Freude" https://www.poetry.com/poem/14346/ode-to-joy

Collect of the Day, Proper 14. The eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP, 232)

Today we celebrate the Feast of Clare of Assisi, nun (died 11 August 1253 CE).
http://satucket.com/lectionary/Clare.htm
https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-clare-of-assisi/

Collect of the Feast of Clare of AssisiO
God, whose blessed Son became poor that we, through his poverty, might become rich: Deliver us from an inordinate love of this world, that we, inspired by the devotion of your servant Clare, might serve you with singleness of heart and attain to the riches of the age to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A Collect for Peace
Most holy God, the source of all good desires, all right judgments, and all just works: Give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, so that our minds may be fixed on the doing of your will, and that we, being delivered from the fear of all enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through the mercies of Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen. (BCP, 123)

Of the Departed
Eternal Lord God, you hold all souls in life: Give to your whole Church in paradise and on earth your light and your peace; and grant that we, following the good examples of those who have served you here and are now at rest, may at the last enter with them into your unending joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (BCP, 253)

A Collect for Early Evening
Grant us, Lord, the lamp of charity which never fails, that it may burn in us and shed its light on those around us, and that by its brightness we may have a vision of that holy City, where dwells the true and never-failing Light, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP, 110)

A Collect for Mission
Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers which we offer before you for all members of your holy Church, that in their vocation and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (BCP, 100)

<u>Daily Office Gospel, John 3:22-36</u>

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent
some time there with them and baptized. 23John also was baptizing at Aenon near
Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being
baptized 24—John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison. 25Now a
discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. 26They came
to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to
whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him.' 27John answered,
'No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. 28You
yourselves are my witnesses that I said, "I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent
ahead of him." 29He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the
bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For
this reason my joy has been fulfilled. 30He must increase, but I must decrease.' 31The
one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the
earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all.
32He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony.
33Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. 34He
whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without
measure. 35The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands.
36Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see
life, but must endure God's wrath.

<u>Daily Offices in the Book of Common Prayer</u>
Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *The Book of Common Prayer*
Noonday Prayer, page 103, *Book of Common Prayer*
Order of Worship for Evening (Vespers), p 109, *Book of Common Prayer*
Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*
Compline (Night Prayer), page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*
Daily Devotionals, page 136, *Book of Common Prayer*