

November 2, 2025

Paul Purdue preaching

A few weeks after my father died, I steadied myself for the first Sunday back preaching. I did not want my grief to interrupt my sermon. My sermon went fine, but as I came to the Communion Table the ritual landed in a new way. I raised my arms and said,

*“And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:”*

As the congregation responded I began to weep...

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest

Blessed is the one who come in the name of the Lord

Hossana in the highest

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven... we join their unending hymn. I wept, remembering Dad, who seemed to find a refuge in music: Dad, who listened to the Metropolitan Opera in his workshop rebuilding some old carburetor, Dad, who listened to the double album 2 hour complete performance of Handel's Messiah every Holy Week, at times in tears. I thought of Saturdays on the farm cutting firewood, when dad might break into song and dance as he cleaned an old chainsaw...

If I were a rich man

Ya ba dibba dibba dibba dibba dibba dibba dum

All day long, I'd biddy biddy bum

If I were a wealthy man

I wouldn't have to work hard

Ya ba dibba dibba dibba dibba dibba dibba dum

If I were a biddy biddy rich yidle-diddle-didle-didle man

I did not realize at 16 that Tevye in Fiddler on the Roof was singing to God and maybe dad was too? It's wild how our minds can jump in a millisecond from the communion table to Handel Messiah, to dad strutting around dancing like a Jewish Dairyman In Tsarist Russia. When we grieve, our brain's amygdala shifts into hyperdrive flooding us with feelings and memories, sometimes triggered at unexpected moments. We can find ourselves weeping one moment and rejoicing in the next. This is all part of God's design, part of being made in God's image.

So I stood there weeping, pondering all the people on earth and all the company of heaven joining in an unending hymn: my father, a fixture in the church choir in standing in off-white polyester choir robe singing with Moses, Myriam, Mozart, and Leontyne (LEE-on-TINE) Price. I stood there alone, with no associate pastor to assist me and I could not stop weeping. So I pushed on through the liturgy with tears running down my face. I felt awkward, unprofessional, and exposed. My contact started floating. As I moved down to serve the congregation I suddenly realized the whole congregation was with me. Some placed a hand on my shoulder, others squeezed my hand as they took the bread, and some greeted my weeping with their own tears. I have rarely felt so carried, so loved, so embraced by a congregation. It was a holy moment. Weep with those who weep. Rejoice with those who rejoice.

The apostle Paul loved these long lists of instagram worthy daily affirmations and reminders. Paul's top ten lists serve as benchmark reminders, core teachings more important than whole chapters about speaking in tongues, gender roles, or meat offered to idols. Paul's little lists hold core values- like early creeds.

*Let your love be genuine;
Resist what is evil; hold fast to what is good;
love one another;
outdo one another in showing honor.
Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord.*

*Rejoice in hope;
be patient in affliction;
persevere in prayer.
Contribute to the needs of the saints;
pursue hospitality to strangers.*

*Bless those who persecute you;
bless and do not curse them.
Rejoice with those who rejoice;
weep with those who weep.*

Do we think of “*Rejoicing with those who rejoice; weeping with those who weep*” as core Christian values? Do we think of compassion, empathy and celebration as spiritual disciplines? Do we have a theology of tears and one of infectious celebration? Do we have a theology of incarnation: of dwelling with each other? When we think of Jesus, fully God and fully human, do we think about God incarnating, holding, embracing our deepest sorrows and highest joys? Can we ponder incarnate joy and grief?

In Acts, when Philip fully welcomes the Ethiopian eunuch they read from Isaiah 53. The Ethiopian outsider asks Phillip, *"is this passage about the prophet or someone else?"* The early church understood Jesus to be the suffering servant in Isaiah 53

*Jesus was despised and rejected by others;
 a human of suffering and acquainted with infirmity,
 and as one from whom others hide their faces
 Christ was despised, and we held him of no account.
 Surely Christ has borne our infirmities
 and carried our diseases,
 yet we accounted him stricken,
 struck down by God, and afflicted.
 But Jesus was wounded for our transgressions,
 crushed for our iniquities;
 upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
 and by his bruises we are healed.*

As one crushed by judgement, once cut off from full inclusion, the eunuch surely found a kindred spirit in Jesus, who came to incarnate our weeping and rejoicing. The Word became flesh and dwelt in the wholeness of our human experience. On the cross Jesus, the Crucified God, bore, carried, held, incarnated all the suffering, griefs, and tears of all humanity. Yes, we rejoice as we move through Good Friday's grief into Easter's joy, but we do not have to but trade our sorrows or lay down our pain, no perfect love weeps with those who weep.

Jesus, in John 11 declares, *"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."* But in that same chapter Jesus heard Martha questioning *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died"* and *"when Jesus saw Mary weeping and the crowd weeping with her, Jesus was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.... And Jesus began to weep."* Is there any feeling more holy than compassion?

And Jesus wept over the broken political systems of his day *"As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!" ... Then Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there,"* (Luke 19) There are things in this world worth crying over: injustice, evil, oppression, abuse, hatred, indifference.

And Jesus wept for himself *“Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and began to be distressed and agitated. Jesus said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” And going a little farther, Jesus threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.”* (Mark 14) Jesus called over some friends and invited them to keep watch with him, while he wept. We can do the same. We can watch over one another in love with tears and rejoicing. Jesus shared his heaviness of heart with his inner circle, so can we. Do not be afraid to call up some friends to share a good cry. Weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who rejoice. It is a spiritual practise

*So on this all saints day,
Let your love be genuine;
Resist what is evil;
hold fast to what is good;*

*love one another;
outdo one another in showing honor.
serve the Lord.*

*Rejoice in hope;
be patient in affliction;
persevere in prayer.*

*Contribute to those in need
pursue hospitality to strangers.
Bless those who persecute and do not curse them.*

*Remember what is good
Release what does harm
Rejoice with those who are rejoicing;
weep with those who are weeping.*

*Do not be afraid to call over some friends for a good cry
Do not be afraid
You were made to weep
to incarnate joy and grief
For our tears are often the pathway back into life. Amen.*