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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
8/16/2009, Pentecost 11B  
Ephesians 5:15-20, John 6:51-58  
Making Melody to the Lord

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

<sup>18</sup>And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; <sup>19</sup>Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and *making melody in your heart* to the Lord; (Ephesians 5:18-19, KJV)

These are fun days for me in our parish because of some of our little ones -- two little boys and a little girl. I believe I mentioned to you recently the joy I had in seeing newborn Erik Edward Soloway, the son of Rene and Mark Soloway. I went to nearby Lenox Hill Hospital just nine days ago and said the prayers of thanksgiving for Erik's safe birth.

Also I am looking forward to the baptism of young Dashiell Joseph Tota, the son of Amy and Jon Tota. They call him Dash. His baptism is scheduled for Sunday, September 13, about a month from now.

And today we celebrate the baptism of nine-month-old Kayla Rose Jones, the second child of Samantha and Lawrence Jones. My! How time flies! Why, Lawrence was one of my catechism students here at Immanuel. Now he is grown-up, blessed to be married to Samantha. He is a New York City policeman and father of two beautiful children.

I am happy for these three children, Erik, Dash, and Kayla, and I am happy for so very many of the children of our parish because they have the chance to grow up inspired with a holy intoxication! I do not mean that they shall be drinkers of wine, but drinkers of the Holy Spirit. They will learn of Jesus. They will learn of love. They will learn of heaven. It will be no strange thing if there is a kind of mirth in their hearts and song on their lips. It will be no wonder if they grow up singing of marvelous things, of how "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know," and later, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" and other great hymns of the church. These little ones are going to have a chance to make melodies unto the Lord, and their lives will be richer because of these melodies.

Take little Kayla Rose, for example. We are honored to baptize her today. Kayla is going to grow up in faith that she is loved. She is blessed with good parents. It is the same with Dash and Erik: they are going to grow up conscious that they are loved.

Their confidence in love will be no scientific deduction based upon a calm

evaluation of the evidence in their world.<sup>1</sup> They will not *conclude* that they are loved, but rather, they will flourish *because* they are loved. They will not believe in love because of science or logic, but because they *receive* love from their parents. Faith that they are loved is what will permit them to face this world with some mirth in their hearts and melodies on their lips.

As it is with little children, so it is with the humanity in general: The Triune God longs for them to be in the Church in unity with Christ so that they can go on in this world in confidence that they are loved. For that is the content of the Gospel: the resurrection of Jesus means that we are loved, sinners though we be. The treasure of the Church is the conviction we want people to have deep in their hearts that reality is good, that it will work out well, indeed, it will work out very well, for Christ is alive and eager for us to join him in lives of love in this world.

Martin Luther used to make a distinction between God's Word and making *use* of that Word.<sup>2</sup> That is what we want for Kayla, for all the children of our parish, for ourselves, and for all the world: we want us all to have some faith as we face things. We do not want simply to *be* baptized, but also to *use* our baptism:

To appreciate and use Baptism aright, we must draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and we must retort, "But I am baptized! And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body." (Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, Baptism.)

This fundamental confidence about life about which Luther speaks brings me to today's text, from Ephesians Chapter Five. St. Paul writes this:

<sup>18</sup>And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; <sup>19</sup>Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; (Ephesians 5:18-19, KJV)

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<sup>1</sup> The Dominical theologian Herbert McCabe, who died in 2001, is especially good at making this point. He was a modern-day Christian apologist, like C.S. Lewis or G.K. Chesterton. See especially *Faith Within Reason* (Continuum: New York, 2007), pages 33-40.

<sup>2</sup> "Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but *put to use and enjoyed*, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation." (Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, The Third Article of the Creed. My emphasis.)

This is what we want: that the human heart should sing with joy, making melody to the Lord.

Earlier in St. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, he had urged Christians away from contentiousness and clamour. He urged us to put off bitterness and slander and the swing of the angry fist. Rather than these quarrelsome things, he invited us toward gentleness of speech and conduct:

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32, KJV)

Now, lest we sell ourselves short and underestimate the nobility of which we are capable, St. Paul speaks of the heart. This is a deeper matter than gentleness of speech, for speech can be gentle even though the heart be churning, churning with frustration and fear. People of discipline might speak in a tenderhearted way, they might forgive one another even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven them, yet the heart might remain unhappy all the while. God bless such folk for their piety - for their ability to conduct themselves in a Christlike way even when they feel dull and chilly inside. God bless such folks strong! Yet such cold obedience has not yet reached the heights our Maker desires for us. Aye, dull obedience falls short of the holy intoxication of which the apostle speaks in today's text:

<sup>18</sup>And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

What a grand goal St. Paul speaks of here: to be drunk with the Holy Spirit! To be intoxicated with Christlike love! To be inebriated with goodwill toward others! One cannot be drunk continually, I suppose, but at least for some stretches in our lives, it would be good to have a merry heart, to cast forth blessings liberally, to smile upon each of our neighbors, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to know something of that joy which is "unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Peter 1:8, KJV)

When golden-tongued St. John Chrysostom pondered the words of Jesus in today's Gospel Lesson, his heart seems to have become intoxicated with the Spirit, so that his heart and his speech were lifted up above the normal course of things. He had read the same words we heard just a few moments ago, about Christ's desire to inhabit our souls. This is the gift of the Blessed Sacrament. This is the chief benefit of the Bread of Life, that we might become an abode of the Lord:

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. (John 6:56, RSV)

Awesome is the Blessed Sacrament. Breath-taking is the Bread of Life. What a blessed house you and I are invited to be! What a holy habitation, to think that

Christ himself is willing to abide in us. Here there is encouragement and nobility enough for us, and here there is hope for the city. And under the inspiration of such things, Chrysostom lets his tongue fly in praise of the Blessed Sacrament:

Let us then return from that table like lions breathing fire, having become terrible to the devil; thinking on our Head, and on the love which He hath shown for us....Fiercer than fire the river boileth up, yet burneth not, but only baptizeth that on which it layeth hold... This is the price of the world, by This Christ purchased to Himself the Church, by This He hath adorned Her all. (Chrysostom, Homily XLVI, John vi. 41, 42)

The man is beside himself! He is a happy man. He imagines us lions, returning from the Blessed Sacrament “like lions breathing fire, having become terrible to the devil.” The man is drunk. He is filled with the Holy Spirit. And he would invite you and me to have happier hearts than we might have known heretofore.

Imagine being a soldier on the eve of a great battle. Imagine, further, that your commander strolls among the troops giving you encouragement for the morrow. Perhaps you are a Civil War soldier the night before Gettysburg. Perhaps you are part of the invasion of Normandy. Your commander knows the dangers you face and so, by way of encouragement, he encourages you to eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you fight.

If by “eat, drink, and be merry,” he includes drunkenness with wine, that would be no good. Wine will not make you stronger or sharper for the great uncertainties ahead of you.

But if your cause be a good one, if you believe in its justice, if you believe that Jesus can smile upon your work, then enter into that work fortified by your baptism. Enter even into a strange world singing hymns and spiritual songs, making melody unto the Lord, for the Lord will not abandon you in that strange world.

Recall our member Maggie Luthar, for example. This coming week, she is off for Norway. She means to study and work there for the next nine months. When I think of Norway, I think of one of my favorite composers, Edvard Grieg. I think of the great fiords of Norway. I think of my elementary school geography textbooks with their beautiful photographs of Norway. But if I try to imagine myself doing what Maggie is now doing, I find myself conscious not only of the romance and beauty of Norway, but also of the practicalities. I imagine what it would be like to be so far away from home, in a world in which I do not yet know the language and do not have friends or family nearby. I think of how far north it is and how I would need to adjust to a different arc of the sun. There would be a thousand uncertainties ahead of me, but I pray that I could keep this *certainty* in mind: that Norway is not strange nor unknown to my Saviour, and he will guard me there too, strong! And in recalling that, I hope that I would be able to sing hymns and spiritual songs and make melody in my heart to the Lord, to whom belongs the

glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.