

Hava Nagilah – Rejoice!  
Isaiah 65:17-19  
Twenty-third Sunday After Pentecost  
November 17, 2019  
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Isaiah 65:17-19 (MSG) New Heavens and a New Earth

17-19 “Pay close attention now:

I’m creating new heavens and a new earth.

All the earlier troubles, chaos, and pain  
are things of the past, to be forgotten.

Look ahead with joy.

Anticipate what I’m creating:

I’ll create Jerusalem as sheer joy,  
create my people as pure delight.

I’ll take joy in Jerusalem,  
take delight in my people:

I heard a radio preacher tell a story about a seminarian who was in a preaching class and had submitted a sermon to be critiqued. The professor suggested that it didn’t matter how good the content a sermon was if the TITLE was boring. The title needed to grab the attention of the audience.

The prof suggested envisioning a busload of people sitting at a stoplight, next to your church’s marquee. The people onboard can see the title of the upcoming sermon, so would the title entice them to get off the bus and come inside?

Make the title more exciting!

So the seminarian gave it some thought and scratched out the old title and scribbled a new title.

This time the professor couldn’t deny the marquee-worthy, get-off-the-bus-motivating title. It was “There’s a Bomb on Your Bus.”

Off the bus and into the church! Amen?

So, I wonder if you read OUR marquee this week?

Or are curious as you read the bulletin?

As many of you know, I went to college to study what I thought I was good at...theatre and music. Turns out, I was “okay” – but sure not good enough to feed myself in the way I liked. I could have gotten stuck there but God had other plans and it took a while to reveal the “unstuck.”

And I’ve been blessed A LOT in God’s plan.

When I was a senior, I was asked to run the Student Activity office for the college! It wasn’t a huge college but IT WAS THE WHOLE COLLEGE!

The sweet nuns “in charge” convinced me that “unless you do this, Sister Diana can’t finish her PhD.

Tell me:

\* How to turn down a gaggle of nuns and deny Sr. Diana **her** aspirations?

\* How to be a student, a coordinator AND still be able to be involved in the production of “Fiddler on the Roof”!?

\* Oh, how DO YOU turn down a gaggle of nuns?

Thankfully, my drama professor (in cahoots with that gaggle, she was a nun, too) cast me, not in the larger role of Golda, the mother, but of Tzeitel, the eldest daughter of Golda and Tevya. The smaller role let me do ALL the other things I needed to do AND get to sing the classic:

*“Matchmaker, matchmaker...*

*Make me a match,*

*Find me a find,*

*Catch me a catch....”*

While at first I thought I was going to be stuck, away from the musical, I got unstuck, ran a great season of activities for my college, and kept my studies up.

One of my fondest memories of “Fiddler” was the wedding scene (yeh, Tzeitel was the bride) and the choreography of the bottle dance to the Jewish music “Hava Nagilah” – makes you want to Netflix the movie, doesn’t it?

And I got to see “Fiddler on the Roof” from a different perspective.

It wasn’t what I EXPECTED (or thought I wanted) but the blessings that God is now helping me recall - brings about rejoicing!

That, yes, brings us to today's message about rejoicing.

Here we are at the Sunday before the end of the church year.

Next Sunday, is Christ the King Sunday and we'll **celebrate** Jesus Christ.

I gotta admit, I was kinda STUCK at how to jump back into the lectionary for today when I **want** to get to that celebration ...and then God revealed, AGAIN, God's plan to UNSTUCK me and focus on today's OT Scripture.

*"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; [God says] for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness" (Is. 65:17-18)*

Be glad. And rejoice - what a word! To express joy at a level that is at a level where words aren't enough.

We see something close to it at sporting events

We see it on parent's faces when their child grows up and chooses, wisely, their spouse.

Or at a wedding party, like in "Fiddler on the Roof", when those bottle dancers accomplish that feat!

So, "marquee readers" – have YOU ever used the Hebrew words for "rejoice"? Have you ever sung it?

*"Hava Negilah, hava negilah, hava negilah vay nis may cha"*

I am not a student of Hebrew (yet) but my research for today shared that the word "gilah," like so many words in the Hebrew language, is more of a picture than a concept.

"Gilah" means to dance with joy, maybe in a circle, and there is singing.

The modern song actually comes from the celebration after World War II when Jewish people were saved despite horrible odds against them.

And while THAT's a crazy good thing to celebrate, we, Dear Friends, have even more to celebrate...and to invite others to celebrate with us as we rejoice and celebrate the greatest victory...the one Jesus Christ accomplished FOR us.

Hava Negilah! Let's rejoice!

It's too bad that through the ages, the "church" decided that in view of God's work, "we need to be highly dignified in order to be reverent."

Now, I'll admit there are times for quiet, solemn celebration. But scripture, like today's reading, often describes the response to God's outpouring of mercy and grace, with words like "**rejoice and be glad.**"

Somehow, we've toned those words down as they came into English. "Be glad," our modern dictionaries say, means to "be pleased." [Yawn] Yet the Hebrew is more like "abounding in delight", "amazed." One of the best uses of "Hava nagilah" is in Jeremiah (31:13) when that prophet wrote: "[God] will turn your mourning into dancing!"

While the "end of the church year" sounds like a wind-down...we really need to be UNSTUCK and gear up to dance and celebrate.

Why?

Because God has created something new...  
...and we watch for it with anticipation.

God broke time when God stepped into a human body to be with us.  
The past with the old burdens of "stuck"  
...the old life BEFORE we knew Jesus,  
...THE PAST is gone!

We're UNSTUCK! Ain't THAT worth rejoicing!

This could easily turn into an Easter message!  
But, if it causes us to re-think our new lives in Jesus Christ...months since the last Easter or before we come to the next one...

...then we should be getting our “hava nagilah” on right now!

Rejoice!

And bring someone else to rejoice with you!

When we celebrate the new life we have in Christ, boy have we got things to celebrate!

The grave couldn't hold him.

God raised him from the dead and, because we are united to Christ through our baptisms, we can read in Romans (6:5) that as we've been united in His death, we're also united in His resurrection!

It says in Ephesians (2:8-9) *“Because it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith; not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God;”*

Wow! If ever there was something to hava nagilah about!

When Isaiah proclaims, we have to remember that God has created a new heaven and earth, and you and I are part of that new creation!

That makes us part of Gods greatest work!

God took humanity, took US, STUCK, damaged, and broken, and fixed us

God came along and BROKE time...Just pulverized the OLD and recreated the NEW!

That's what Isaiah is talking about when he wrote God's words: (v. 17-18)

*“and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice [but hava nagilah forever in that which I create”*

What kind of things shall not be remembered or come to mind?

“Uhhmmm. Don't know,” God says, “can't remember them!”

We do though.

**We** get STUCK remembering the times we've sinned against God; maybe with our false idols of money or pride, and other sins, like the ones we commit against each other...

But, those won't be remembered.

The things that would have KEPT US STUCK aren't recorded.

When God broke time – God broke time’s greatest power – that death IS no longer final and our sins are erased.

Talk about things to rejoice! Hava nagilah!

So what SHOULD be remembered?

We remember: we say it whenever we have Holy Communion...we say it in the liturgy: ...”do this in remembrance of me...

... that the Body and Blood of Christ were given and make us newly created in our relationship with God.

Don’t stay STUCK in the past that has been, God says, forgotten.

Be Unstuck in new life.

From there we have the “peace which passes all understanding...”

...the “joy of the Lord”...

...that “God so loved...” and

...every new day “that the Lord has made”

God has redeemed His people.

God has gathered the saints into His holy city and we will join them in God’s time...and there will be joy that can’t be expressed in words!

Dancin’ on the streets of gold!

And I’ll put out there that WE aren’t the only one’s dancing!

Like the wedding dance in “Fiddler on the Roof”, the Hava Nagilah is, in Jewish culture, led by the father of the groom.

There is great rejoicing by our Heavenly Father that there are promises of new life in Creation and His son, the bridegroom, has chosen his Bride, us, the church, well.

It says in verse 20: *“I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people.”*

Remember, the word for rejoice is “gilah” and God is rejoicing, too, over what has happened to us. God has renewed us to love and care for us and God’s so full of joy that He is leading the dance!

Hava nagilah – rejoice with God!

The chorus of the Jewish song (which I won't attempt to pronounce here) says something like this IN ENGLISH: "Awake, awake, my Brother! Awake with a joy filled heart."

So:  
No matter what we're stuck in (or have been stuck at.)  
No matter what seems to be UNstuckable...  
...Dear Ones, God's plan is to bring us into a time AND place of rejoicing. That's what God's grace is for!

Feeling STUCK?  
Wake up and see this as a time to rejoice because we have a God who delights in us and wants the best for us.  
He didn't spare THE best – God's son, our Savior, Jesus Christ...

Our reaction to this most wonderful giving...and to the glorious resurrection of our Lord...is be awake and rejoice...and don't hold back sharing the great and wonderful Good News with others...and invite them, to dance with you!

Hava nagilah!

AMEN!