

Sermon for Morning Prayer: Make a joyful noise, King's Chapel
September 28, 2008
Given by the Reverend Joanne M. Giannino

Text: *Matthew 21:28-32*

When I first interviewed for the job as Assistant Minister at King's Chapel I asked people, and some of you who are visiting today may be asking, what is the focus of the ministry here? When I talked to people, three major areas emerged:

- First, a ministry of worship that includes three services a week
(This one – Morning Prayer, the Family Service at 9:45 on Sundays in the Little Chapel at the Parish House – and the church school program – and the midweek service on Wednesdays at noon)
- Second, a ministry of music
(Including the music provided on Sunday mornings here, the Tuesday recitals, and the Sunday evening concert series that occurs once a month and begin in October, oh and a very unique Children's Music Ministry that happens during church school. Ask me about it!)
- Third, a ministry of history
(That includes our fantastic guide program in which paid and volunteer guides teach thousands of visitors a year about the importance of King's Chapel in the history of the United States and in American Unitarianism.)

Since then I have come to know that ministry is going on all the time at King's Chapel between members and friends, that all that we do contributes to the ministry, and, in fact all that we do here at King's Chapel – from hosting coffee hour to making policy decisions to smiling at one another in greeting – is ministry – is service – is our faith in action.

To firm up this idea that all we do is ministry, let's imagine for a moment that all our committees are renamed to reflect that reality. So, for example, we have the Ministry of Hospitality, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Religious Education. And then the Ministry of Stewardship, the Ministry of Denominational Affairs, and the Ministry of Chancel Arts.

Every time we meet together at church ministry is happening - all the time with one another, and in turn to the wider world. Everything we do and say, says something about who we are and who we are becoming, religiously.

And let's just imagine, and this true, that King's Chapel, here at the corner of Tremont and School Streets, has afforded people the opportunity to minister for 322 years. And will provide such opportunities for at least another 322 years! King's Chapel is here for a purpose. King's Chapel has a reason for being.

King's Chapel is a very unique place with a beauty and promise all its own and you have a say in what that means; you are a part of it. And, *this* is what I'd like to lift up this morning.

Since last spring I have been hearing a phrase over and over in my head, part of a psalm 100:

Make a joyful noise, King's Chapel!

I have even posted it on the bulletin board in the vestibule. I hear it and want to whisper it into each of your ears because I want to encourage you to tell each other and the world who you are. I want to encourage you to shout from the hilltops about this gem in the center of the city. This is a particular community – with a particular call to, and place from which to, serve the world.

The worship style here is a very traditional Anglican service. The language is beautiful. The rhythm is tested and sure. The movement lends itself to a letting go of the everyday world and entering into the world of spirit. When one opens fully to this – the words, the rhythm, the movement – transcendence is possible: a moment of touching that, which is greater than we; that which is beyond words; that for which words are only a metaphor. I have felt that here. Have you?

Moreover, we worship in this ancient style within a Unitarian context. That means that the worshippers who gather to experience this grounding and opening liturgy also gather in the spirit of freedom, reason, and tolerance. They are free here to honor their spiritual journey wherever it takes them. In these pews, there are those who have a particular name for their theology: Christian, liberal Christian, ethical Christian, Unitarian, Unitarian Universalist, humanist, agnostic, atheist, seeker, and more. In addition, there are those who claim no particular label – are not inclined to call themselves Christian or any other name. That is why when we say the prayer for All Sorts and Conditions of Man Kind we add: “and those who earnestly seek thee by whatever name.”

This theological diversity within a liturgical worshipping community is one of the great gifts of King's Chapel. And this, my spiritual friends, is something to share with one another and others. We have here at King's Chapel a ritual grounded in tradition within which transcendence is possible, comfort may be found and freedom can be attained. And, we have a broad and deep theological openness that offers each of us the freedom to grow and moreover places us in the larger context of religion's most inclusive relations. What better gift to offer?

One of my questions as I have been here is what do *you* get from being a member or friend of King's Chapel? What keeps you coming?

Some say it *is* the worship –it nourishes your soul, fills you up and carries you through the week. Some say it *is* the music – it lifts you up and revitalizes you. Some say it *is* the history – especially the partner church relationship you have with the Unitarian Church of Kolozsvar in Transylvania – the birthplace of our faith.

Some say it is the people – they love the people here. And I have witnessed the care and concern you have for one another. The way you light up when you greet one another and the way you

reach out when there is an illness or death or difficulty. You feed one another body and spirit with food and visits and compassion. You walk together and share your common bond.

What are the parts of King's Chapel's life and ministry that keep you coming? I say let us talk more about that. Has being part of this community transformed your life? Has being a part of this community saved your soul? Enlivened you to both face life's challenges and feel the depth of joy available to all? Has the care of others helped you through difficult times? Why do **you** come?

Now, I have only been here a year so my testimony is new but I have been changed by being part of this community. What if we all gave testimony – testimony to the power and promise of belonging to this community? I'll start.

It was Communion Sunday and I had the opportunity to attend Morning Prayer not as preacher or co-officiate but as parishioner. I could relax a bit, melt into the cushion, stand and sit with the congregational body, listen to the sermon, and let the liturgy wash over me and under me and through me. It was good.

Then we got to Communion, which became a challenge of sorts. To receive Communion or not; To take a communion or not; To rest or not.

Jesus says: 'come to me all you that are weary and are carrying a heavy burden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

Well my burden felt silly, but insistent. The committee in my head (you know the one) had many questions: should we walk up there? Do we need to? Will anyone notice if I do or don't? What will it feel like? What are we doing up there anyway? What does it mean?

And so it went. At some point, I just got up and walked up toward the rail. I had sat in the back on the side aisle, so I stood in line in the dark, hands held in the posture I have assumed since childhood as a Roman Catholic, and waited my turn. I kneeled on the ancient cushion with all the others and waited my turn, hands clasped still and resting on the rail. When the minister said, 'Take, eat this in remembrance of Christ,' and offered me the bread, I opened my hands and took it. I said thank you and waited. And when the other minister said, 'Drink this in memory of Christ,' and offered me the cup of wine, I put the bread in my mouth, and took the cup offered and drank. I said thank you and waited. Then when they said jointly, 'Go in peace,' I pushed off my knees and walked back to my pew.

When I got back to my little pew, I shut the door and sat again on the cushion. And then, almost suddenly, there was a noticeable shift in my consciousness: I noticed the couple in front of me and felt this rush of compassion for them. I was no longer thinking about myself. My mind became really quiet. My body still. I became really aware of being one of many, and more, of the many, not even a one in some way. I came to rest in communion with the others in the room.

By fully participating in the ritual of Communion, one of the ministries of KC, I was changed, even for a while, filled with compassion and aware at a deep level that I am part of a larger body – this one. So I come back for more!

Again, I ask you what has been your experience of being a part of King’s Chapel? How has being part of this community worked on you? Transformed you? Kept you coming back?

This transforming power is available to each of us. I invite you to share your stories with others. In fact what I’d like to do this morning is invite you to join with each other and me, if you have time and interest, in the vestry to share about what keeps you coming to King’s Chapel. What about being part of the ministry here feeds you? What has changed you? What would you like more of? So, if you’d like to spend a few moments sharing and listening, please, grab some refreshment and then let’s join together.

In our text from Matthew, Jesus asks, “what do you think?” I think he is telling us: trust your own experience. He doesn’t answer the question for his listeners, or for us. He does say that some will find their way to the kingdom of heaven before others: the kingdom, here inside each one of us, and the kingdom, here among others in community.

What do you think?

What is your experience of the beauty and promise of King’s Chapel and its ministry?

What keeps you coming back for more?

Let us lift that up.

Let us make a joyful noise as we gather to worship and in all our moments together.

Let us share that with the world!

Amen.