



FROM THE RECTOR

C.S. Lewis once wrote *"Joy... is the serious business of heaven."* The word *"Joy"* is found more than 150 times in the Bible. Yet *Joy*, in the Bible, is not the same as feeling good, or happiness, or even a good belly laugh. No, *Joy* is a spiritual response to the gift of life itself. Paul writes to the Galatians that *Joy* is one of the fruits of the Spirit, evidence, if you will, that one is filled with the presence of God.

I do not know about you, but if I had my druthers, I would rather be around joyful folk than those who fall in the other lot. One of the most famous of Christian hymns is Henry van Dyke's *"Joyful, joyful, We Adore Thee."* He wrote the hymn in 1907, inspired by seeing the beautiful Berkshire Mountains in Massachusetts, with the caveat that it should only be sung to Beethoven's "Hymn of Joy." He said it was a hymn of *"...trust, and joy and hope"*² *Joy* is a response that we give, not a drummed-up feeling.

I have sometimes wondered why the Bible tells us "The Lord loves a cheerful giver...,"³ You and I know that our Lord loves *everyone*, full stop. But you can't deny the fact that the words are there in black and white. There is just something about "giving" that brings a smile to the Lord's face and a warmth to His heart.

Now we give in all kinds of ways, but right now I am asking you, on behalf of our Vestry, to make a sacrificial gift of the treasure entrusted to your care by our Lord to His work in and through St. Martin's.

¹ Galatians 5:22.

² Robert Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), p. 265.

³ I Corinthians 9:7.

I am inviting you to pledge. Specifically, this is what I am asking you to do:

Pray FIRST. Right now, pause, and say a prayer. Ask God to guide you as to how to respond to His generosity to you.

Consider. There are many things to consider when making this kind of Holy decision but let this be your guide. At St. Martin's we believe in and teach the Biblical principal of **tithing**. In short, giving to Christ's work 10 percent of the 100% God has given us.

Make Your Pledge

- If you regularly pledge and have achieved the goal of tithing in your giving, then please continue to do so.
- If you regularly pledge but have not reached the goal of tithing, take an intentional and substantial step by increasing your pledge for the 2024 year and move toward achieving that goal.
- If you do not pledge, and you are a member of St. Martin's, my dear friend, now is the time to do so. Do not let the burden of supporting our Lord's work fall to other members of your Church family. If you are a member, then an expectation is that you will pledge. This is not a burden; it is a privilege to make possible our Lord's work. To take from St. Martin's without giving, is not the St. Martin's Way. To give so that others may be blessed, is the St. Martin's Way and it is God's way. So, this year, make a first-time pledge and then continue the journey each year.

Give Thanks. Thank the good Lord for giving you the faith and courage to do this very God-like thing. As my predecessor Claude Payne used to say, *"You will never regret giving away one dime to the Lord's work — never."*

I invite you to personally experience the God-inspired journey of **Joyful Living, Joyful Giving.**

May your Companion in this very important process be our Lord Jesus, and perhaps, may the song that finds its way into your heart be *"Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee. God of glory, Lord of love...Giver of immortal gladness... Lift us to the joy divine...."*

Please join Laura and me in supporting our Lord's work for the 2024 Church year by giving cheerfully, gratefully and joyfully. Bless you!

Faithfully, Cheerfully and Joyfully,

The Reverend Russell J. Levenson, Jr., D. Min., D.D.
4th Rector of St. Martin's Episcopal Church