

## ALWAYS REJOICING<sup>1</sup>

**A sermon preached by Associate Professor Michael Horsburgh AM in St James' Church, King Street, Sydney, on the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, 24 July 2022, being the orchestral premier of the *Mass of St James*' by Gabriel Jackson and the celebration of St James' Day**

*Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.*<sup>2</sup>

Today is our third attempt to perform Gabriel Jackson's *Mass of St James*' and thus my third attempt to preach this sermon. Although the COVID 19 infection has not gone away, we are at least able to meet again. We have much for which to rejoice.

My text, from Paul's letter to the Philippians, calls us to constant rejoicing. His call is sufficiently important for him to repeat it in the one verse. Indeed, rejoicing is a significant theme of this letter, appearing nine times, both in relation to himself and as an instruction to others. The text makes it clear that, at the time of writing, Paul is in prison, so rejoicing is to be done regardless of the temporal circumstances. The Greek word translated "always", πάντοτε, includes "at all times" and "ever", a broad meaning that does not depend on location or circumstances. "When Paul tells the Philippians to 'Rejoice in the Lord always', the word 'rejoice' doesn't just mean 'feel very happy deep inside'".<sup>3</sup> As George Hunsinger says, "It is not a matter of elation but of resilience. Nor is it basically introspective but Christocentric".<sup>4</sup>

The emotion evoked by rejoicing is "joy" or "gladness". Elsewhere, Paul describes joy as one of the "fruits of the Spirit", which are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.<sup>5</sup> For Paul, joy is a shared experience, something to have in common with others, particularly the community of faith.<sup>6</sup> Like happiness, joy is not a goal but a product. It is not a matter of will. You are not joyful because you decide to be. You are joyful because of something else. Indeed, from Paul's perspective, joy is a gift from God. In Romans he says, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace".<sup>7</sup> As this morning's Psalm says:

When the Lord turned again the captivity of Sion:  
then were we like unto them that dream.  
Then was our mouth filled with laughter:  
and our tongue with joy.<sup>8</sup>

A direction to rejoice is appropriate in a period when we are celebrating our bicentenary. We rejoice now because of the inheritance into which we have come in this place. We rejoice for

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<sup>1</sup> Readings: Jeremiah 45; Psalm 126; Acts 11:27-12:3; Matthew 20:20-28

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 4:4 (KJV). For the setting by Henry Purcell see [Rejoice In The Lord Alway \(Henry Purcell\) - St. John's Cambridge - YouTube](#)

<sup>3</sup> Tom Wright, *God and the Pandemic*, London, SPCK, 2020, p. 69

<sup>4</sup> George Hunsinger, *Philippians*, (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible), Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2020, pp. 129-130

<sup>5</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

<sup>6</sup> "Fruits of the Spirit", in Gordon S Wainright, *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, London, SCM Press, 1983, pp. 166-167

<sup>7</sup> Romans 15:13. See "Joy" in Alan Richardson, *Theological Word Book of the Bible*, London, SCM Press, 1957, p. 117

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 126 *Book of Common Prayer* translation by Myles Coverdale (1488-1569) [Myles Coverdale - Wikipedia](#)

the cloud of witnesses surrounding us here. Our rejoicing does not rest on any perfection in our history. This parish has experienced many troubled times and will do so again. Nevertheless, we rejoice. Our difficult experiences over the past two years do not mean that we cannot and do not rejoice.

All this brings us to Gabriel Jackson's *Mass of St James*'. As far as I can tell, this is the first Mass commissioned by and for our parish. In that sense, it is particularly our own. In our email communications, Jackson told me that, for him, writing music is not about self-expression. He regards himself as an artisan, a maker, using the example of a stonemason.<sup>9</sup> Of course, composing expresses the composer; how could it not? It is a question rather of intention, of approach. Jackson's self-deprecating approach, however, should not hide from us his distinguished career as outlined in the program notes provided by Robert Forgacs.

In his early contact with Warren Trevelyan-Jones, they discussed how "Australian" the Mass should be. Given that Jackson has not been here, this question may have raised some difficulties. In any case, it is not an easy question, and I find an answer difficult to imagine. I did not expect echoes of Australian bird calls. This should not be an antipodean "The Cuckoo and the Nightingale"; "The Kookaburra and the Magpie", as it were. Nevertheless, Jackson said to me, you may hear birds in the woodwinds, even if that was not his intention.

We asked Jackson to include a Credo, which some contemporary Masses omit. He said to me that, in the Credo, "I wanted things to be quite direct and plain-speaking, almost. It occurred to me afterwards that this might be because I think of Australians as being quite direct". Again, that was not his intention, but his comments remind us that, in the Eucharist, we are not mere spectators or hearers, we are worshippers and we both bring something to the Mass as well as take something away.

Too close an adherence to place may not be desirable. Regardless of how an orchestral mass has come into existence, it remains a liturgical action that is universally available. It must fulfil Paul's command to facilitate rejoicing everywhere. Each composition will, of necessity, reflect its place, time, and specific purpose, but cannot be an instrument of exclusion. A Mass must both embody its origin and rise above it.

But Jackson did put his imagination to work in, what he called, "auralising" the sound of the singers in their space. He also thought about "light, bright light, and the effect of light on stone" as an Australian feature. That resonates with me. I imagine that, for many of us, our return to Australia from overseas is signalled by the quality of the light in our country. Jackson translated this accurate perception into "lots of bright, high sounds, to evoke the idea of light". When I heard the music in rehearsal yesterday and again this morning, I realised that the analogy is not so much with ordinary daylight as with the brilliance of a cloudless summer midday.

Light is a significant Christian theological symbol. Jesus says 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'<sup>10</sup> When, in John 9, Jesus heals the blind man, the point of the story is the contrast between those who claim to see and do not and the blind man who can't see but does. Thus, in addition to encapsulating

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<sup>9</sup> [#mindpower – meet Gabriel Jackson in the United Kingdom - YouTube](#)

<sup>10</sup> John 8:12

something about Australia, a Mass filled with the sounds of light is an analogy for our spiritual lives. Our rejoicing is based on our “seeing the light”, as it were.

Yet it would be a mistake to think that we can experience light without darkness, and that darkness is not part of our experience of God. In his essay with the paradoxical title, “A ray of darkness”, Rowan Williams quotes the 17<sup>th</sup> century poet, Henry Vaughan:

There is in God, some say,  
A deep but dazzling darkness,<sup>11</sup>

Williams argues that, as the light of the world, Jesus does not clear everything up. His light is upsetting, requiring a reworking of myself. Williams says, “In short, when God’s light breaks on my darkness, the first thing I know is that I don’t *know*, and never did”.<sup>12</sup> There is no light without darkness. The lightness of our Mass is thus a challenge to our self-perception.

Jackson’s sounds of light involved choosing the appropriate instruments, given the limitations imposed by our space. In this respect, he evoked the sound of early 19<sup>th</sup> century orchestras and the Viennese Masses at the time of our consecration, prominent wind instruments and small string numbers. Such an evocation is one of time only, because the early music of St James followed the 18<sup>th</sup> century English parish church style. Stand-alone services of Holy Communion appeared briefly in the late 1850s and did not reappear until introduced by Rector William Carr Smith in 1902. Weekly Choral Eucharists, previously a monthly occurrence, did not appear at St James until 1922 under Philip Micklem. Thus, Gabriel Jackson’s Mass celebrates two centenaries, the bicentenary of the parish itself and the centenary of our weekly Choral Eucharist tradition, which has been interrupted only briefly in the period from 1938 to 1942.<sup>13</sup>

In my previous sermons at our contemporary Orchestral Masses, I have commented on the difference between a concert and a liturgical performance of such a composition. Earlier composers wrote almost only for liturgical occasions; concert performances came much later for those Masses. Contemporary composers often write principally for concert performance and may not have imagined their composition in a liturgical environment. On this occasion, Jackson tells me, he was asked to write music lasting between 35 and 40 minutes. That meant, for him, that it would also be suitable for concert performance, evoking a contrast between the public nature of the concert and the more personal nature of the liturgy. Both are, in a sense, public but they each involve the audience in a different way. A Mass in a concert hall should not trouble us. Music is a universal language and can be heard anywhere. Indeed, taking the Mass out of the church is like bringing the world into the Mass through the time-honoured form of “parody mass” where a popular tune is the basis of the music. A striking example is Charpentier’s *Messe de Minuit* of 1694.<sup>14</sup>

Also, Jackson had to produce two versions of his composition, one for orchestra and one for organ. “... because the organ works best in ‘blocks’ of colour that is how the orchestration had to be conceived”. One reason, therefore, why we should rejoice today is that Gabriel Jackson, a skilled artisan, has managed with such success to bring together all the

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<sup>11</sup> Henry Vaughan, “The night”, [The Night by Henry Vaughan | Poetry Foundation](#)

<sup>12</sup> Rowan Williams, “A ray of darkness”, in *Open to Judgement* (also published as *A Ray of Darkness*), London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994, p. 119

<sup>13</sup> This account of the liturgical history of St James is taken from a lecture given at St James by K J Cable on 28 June 1981

<sup>14</sup> [A Baroque Christmas parody Mass | Bibliolore](#)

requirements placed on him in this commission; and to do so from half a world away and without the opportunity to visit us. For that reason, we are able today, in the words of our Introit, “Cantate Domino canticum novum”—“Let us sing unto the Lord a new song”.<sup>15</sup>

In his controversial poem, “Leaves of Grass”, American Walt Whitman commented on our response to music. He said:

All music is what awakens from you when you are reminded by the instruments,  
It is not the violins and the cornets . . . it is not the oboe nor the beating drums—nor the  
notes of the baritone singer singing his sweet romanza . . . nor those of the men’s  
chorus, nor those of the women’s chorus,  
It is nearer and farther than they.<sup>16</sup>

Whitman contrasts the nearness of the music as it is heard and becomes part of us and the distance that it can carry us. This is an appropriate way to encapsulate the importance of music in our liturgical tradition and, particularly, in a composition designed to take the canon of the mass, surround us with sound, and lift us into the presence of the divine.

*Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.*

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<sup>15</sup> Psalm 95

<sup>16</sup> Walt Whitman (1819-1892), *Leaves of Grass*, Brooklyn, W Whitman, 1855, p. 61. The poem was controversial because parts of it were said to reveal Whitman’s homosexuality in an overly erotic way. [Leaves of Grass, 1855 edition \(wiu.edu\)](#)



Gabriel Jackson (b1962)