

May 1, 2022 John 21:1-19, Lect. C 3rd Sun of Easter, Rev. Dr. Rachel Matthews
Second Reading Revelation 5:11-14 "Singing with a Full Voice"

¹¹Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹²singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" ¹³Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" ¹⁴And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Today we celebrate the Centennial Anniversary of the Church of Luyano. Iglesia Presbyteriana Reformada Luyano in Havana is our sister church. She was founded in April 24, 1922 as a result of the late 1890 missionary work of *Evaristo Collazo*. *He was supported by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Southern United States Presbyterian Church. (Rev. Daniel Izquierdo, June 2020)* We have a covenant relationship with Luyano. We are Christians together. We are Reformed together. We are Presbyterians together. Jesus Christ is our Lord. Worthy is the Lamb! This is the history we share together despite cultural and political differences. Our congregation has taken many trips to our sister church since 2010. We are hermanamientos. I will be defining that word better in a moment.

On our last trip to Cuba in 2019, Robert, Judi, Matt and I saw the little pink house in Havana where Iglesia Luyano began. In 1922 there were just a few faithful followers of Jesus Christ meeting and praying together in this very, very small pink home with white trim and an ample front porch. I wonder if their meetings were similar to the gatherings of the early Christians, small groups meeting in people's homes or personal catacombs. Early Christians sought out

those private, hidden spaces to share their radical ideas about love and service, to care and comfort each other and to praise their Savior. There may have been great hardship in their lives but they believed God had not abandoned them.

It is understandable that when people are just trying to survive. They dare not share their radical praise of the Maker of the Universe too publicly around tyrants. There is too much at stake.

Worshipping the God of the Cosmos is a dangerous thing. Why? Because such an act challenges every other power that exists, all governments, all allies, all foes. No one, no principality is bigger than God of the Cosmos. And, so the early Christians and the early Cuban Presbyterians found those private, small places to worship until that time when they could grow and shout it from the highest mountains that Jesus Christ is Lord. The kingdom of God cannot stay, hidden, says Jesus, and the smallest of things grow like mustard seeds or yeast. And, that is what happened. The Christian Church in Cuba grew despite wars, a revolution and oppressive governments.

And now a hundred years later these Cuban Presbyterians in Luyano are worshipping still, more publicly to be sure. They are still radically sharing God's love in their community: Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and giving clean water to the thirsty.

In our trips to Luyano we always stay in the compound where the stately Spanish style church now exists down the block from that little pink house. Luyano Presbyterians sang their praises in that tiny house and they sing today in their full sanctuary even as do we with shouts of joy and songs of Hallelujahs. Alleluia, Alleluia. I invite you to look at the bulletin board downstairs

in Westminster Hall to see some new pictures of their 100th year anniversary celebration that took place last Sunday. Thank you to the Cuba Steering Committee for setting that up. These pictures are new as of this week. Some old pictures are down there too by the mission kiosk. Sign up to be in the next Cuba Study and Trip Preparation.

Did I say we are Celebrating Cuba Sunday and Music Sunday together today. This seems right to me.

I personally cannot think of Cuba without thinking of music and song. Can you? Cuba Son, Cuba Salsa, Rumba, and many other musical genres have come out of and blended with the African, Spanish, European and Indigenous cultural mix on this Island paradise. And, like our own American music, music in Cuba has developed to include more electronic sounds and styles.

Today our choir is singing a mass in a classical style. That may not be the technical genre but such a piece is a nod to those Spanish and Roman Catholic roots that we share with the Cuban sound as well as our religious experience.

Isn't it incredible how human beings can take a few notes, add some rhythms and arrange them into a seemingly endless array of masterpieces of expression? Songs can declare the freedom of the human spirit. Songs can move us from the despair in our lives to a state of incredible joy and hope that is ours to claim in those moments of religious clarity when the ultimacy of things is in order or when God comes to us with inspiration and purpose. We sing because we can, because something deep within us must come out and be shared with the

one who gave us life. Song is the cry of the baby and the language of the soul. Song is our praise to our Maker.

Our text in Revelation points to a coming together of all the voices in heaven and on earth to sing such praises. These words are from the Revelation that John had when he was living on the island of Patmos. Patmos is an island close to the west coast of today's Turkey in the Aegean Sea Southwest of Greece. It is warm and tropical, small and, if you were a fisherman, it is a nice stopping place on the way to bigger places. As I studied the map, I thought how similar it must be to Cuba, always surrounded and threatened by water and nation state powers trying to exercise control of its island resources. Patmos today is an island with about 85000 people living on it. It is a place of religious pilgrimage to the Castle-Monastery of Saint John which dominates the island of Patmos. Cuba, of course is much, much bigger than Patmos off the coast of the Florida Keys but to some of us it also exerts a similar kind of spiritual lure to its shores.

There is a sadder similarity between John and the people of Cuba. John was on Patmos as a prisoner of Nero in the 1st C (54AD). As John was exiled by Nero, sometimes it feels as though Cubans are living essentially as exiles because of the embargos and demands of our own governmental policies. Cubans certainly are suffering. In a recent article from the Presbyterian News service which you can find online on our denominational website, Presbyterian minister, Rev. Joel Ortega Dopico, President of the [Cuban Council of Churches](#) says, "most of the Cubans don't have what they need." He said that older people, children and pregnant women are among those suffering most.

(https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/conditions-in-cuba-decried-during-advocacy-workshop/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=PC%28USA%29+Daily+News&utm_campaign=Daily+eNews+%7C+April+29%2C+2022)

Darla Carter writes this: “The crippling U.S. economic embargo on Cuba that has failed for decades to achieve its goals continues.” [Catherine] Gordon said during the introductory remarks [of Ecumenical Advocacy Days last week]. “The economic situation has never been more dire, and our church partners on the ground are now suffering from shortages of food and medicine.”

As a sister congregation to Luyano we have witnessed this first hand. And, we have tried to respond to dire medical needs as best as we could. Thank you to those who have planned, prayed and contributed. The US embargo makes it difficult. We have had to find other ecumenical bodies to help us navigate other avenues to transport materials. We hear from our hermanamientos in Luyano that they are hopeful and are remaining faithful. We witness that they sing and celebrate. They share what they have with other small rural churches. They are singing their faith with one voice. This is just remarkable. I don’t know how they do it.

Sharing a covenant relationship with our hermanamientos in Cuba is more than just sharing material resources. Sharing material resources is obviously important but it is not what makes us a covenant faith partner does. We share faith. We proclaim we come from the same source. We are branches on the same vine. We are the body of Christ together.

Hermanamientos in many dictionaries means “twinning.” My grandfather was an identical twin. Identical twins share a matching DNA. Their children are more than cousins they are genetic half siblings. Our DNA matches with Luyano. We are brothers and sisters. There is an understanding between twins, a support, a mutuality. As my twin suffers, so I suffer. As my twin rejoices, so I rejoice.

John of Patmos was a Christian during a time in which the church was persecuted. They were weary. He was weary. The fantastic vision God shared with him showed him that churches would respond differently to the threat that was and would come upon them. Some churches would hold fast, some would be lukewarm, some would be immoral, some would be faithful. All would need forgiveness. John's vision also showed how people came together. The elders that were focused on the Lamb of God, that is Jesus Christ, remained faithful and joyous through those dark times. Their hearts and voice were focused on God and God's Son. Worthy is the Lamb! they sang.

The Cubans are showing us how living through trials and tribulations is done. They are faithful in the midst of hunger, inflation and anxiety. Let us not forget them. Let us join with them in song. Let us worship the Lamb of God.

A Resolution from
First Presbyterian Church
Champaign, Illinois, USA

Upon the Centennial Anniversary of the
Iglesia Presbiteriana Reformada en Luyano
Havana, Cuba

Whereas, Jesus Christ is Head of the Church;

Whereas, Christ calls into being and equips the Church for service;

Whereas, Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word, alone ruling, calling, teaching, and using the Church as he wills;

Whereas, Christ gives the Church its life, unity, and mission;

Whereas, Christ Is the Church's Hope;

Whereas, Christ Is the Foundation of the Church;

Whereas, the Church Is the Body of Christ, and Christ gives to the Church all the gifts necessary to be his body;

Whereas, for a century, the Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Luyanó has been devoted to Christ's teaching, faithful to Christ's call, diligent in Christ's mission;

Whereas the Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Luyanó has been a compassionate, servant-minded neighbor to people near and far, offering clean water and good food, worship, education, hospitality, and nurture;

Whereas Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Luyanó has generously welcomed members and friends from First Presbyterian Church in Champaign, and from other churches around the world; and First Presbyterian Church in Champaign and Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Luyanó have forged a rich partnership—an hermanamiento—and that this relationship, we pray, enlivens both our congregations, delights God, and bears witness to the world of what unity in Jesus Christ looks like;

Therefore, be it resolved that, upon the 100th anniversary of the Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Luyanó, we, the Session, Members, and Friends of First Presbyterian Church in Champaign thank God for the ministry, long-suffering witness, and steady-faithfulness of the Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Luyanó; we further pray that the partnership between our congregations will grow in the name of the One who invites us to follow.

To the Glory of God!

Signed by the Session
First Presbyterian Church
Champaign, Illinois, USA

Rev. William P. "Matt" Matthews, moderator

Ann Stout

Ann Weiskink

Mary Nicholas

Mary Jane Kelley

Carol Miles

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