

Neal D. Presa. *Worship, Justice, and Joy: A Liturgical Pilgrimage*. Cascade Books, 2025. 108 pages. \$17.99.

Many Christians would describe their current season as one marked by hurry, burnout, and the felt absence of God's reconciling justice. Put another way, those in the pulpit and the pew are often experiencing joylessness. In *Worship, Justice, and Joy: A Liturgical Pilgrimage*, Neal Presa offers a vulnerable recounting of his own recent journey from joylessness to a place of deep-seated rest and orientation in Joy.

This concise and accessible book is part of the Worship and Witness series, intended to offer interdisciplinary, global perspectives on contemporary issues in public worship. The purpose of *Worship, Justice, and Joy* is most clearly summarized in the epilogue: "We live to worship the living God, who is the source and embodiment of joy, and because he is our Joy we seek to follow the Lord's will and ways. That means seeking the healing and reconciliation of the world." Presa speaks from his experiences as a pastor, liturgical theologian, and former moderator (2012) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He also speaks as an American citizen who maintains rich familial and cultural ties with his Filipino heritage, and as an individual with a passion for reconciliation and justice.

The book's five chapters loosely trace the liturgical movements of gathering around, proclaiming, responding to, sealing, and bearing the Word. When we gather, it is an intentional act of becoming present to one another and to God, showing up with an expectation of encountering "Joy's Truth" (12). Presa suggests that the key to "Joy's Identity" is grounded in baptism, because "the promise of baptism's joy lingers with us for a lifetime" (19). Just as familial and cultural narratives reiterate aspects of personal identity (for better or worse), remembering our baptism reiterates our identity in connection *to* the Church and *for* the flourishing of the world (25).

The third chapter situates "Joy's Speech" in several words of wisdom Presa received upon beginning a portion of the Camino de Santiago. Presa suggests that the proclamation of the Word, especially through the vehicle of preaching, is "the antidote to our proclivity to listen to ourselves" or any other voice incapable of bringing true joy (37). Presa then turns to the significance of the Eucharist as "Joy's Feast." Here, we are encouraged to "attend to unfinished business in the household of faith" as we are reconciled to one another and spurred to offer the feast of joy where injustice has reigned (53). The final chapter discusses "Joy's Work and Witness," which Presa describes as "prayerful action and active prayer for God's shalom vision of transformative justice to be effected in the world" (67).

Worship, Justice, and Joy is directed toward church leaders and congregants alike. It will speak most deeply to those seeking ways to connect with the liturgy in desert seasons. Within each chapter, Presa intertwines several salient episodes from his own recent experience. Though Presa suggests in the introduction that this is "not a personal memoir," the prominence and level of detail in his personal narrative nonetheless shape the overall tone of the book (xx).

As a result, the book is most successful when read as a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage occurs in a specific context, allows for "stops" to make observations within that context, and has an intended destination. Here, the pilgrimage is distinctly Presa's, set within the worship pattern of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The stops along the way include the sights of the Camino de Santiago, the virtual spaces of ministry during Covid-19, the traditions of Filipino family gatherings, and peaceful demonstrations in the wake of George Floyd's murder. The destination

is a renewed encouragement that we have “been given this season of eternity called life for worship, with joy, for the sake of God’s transformative justice in the world” (79).

Readers will get the most out of this book in their own pursuit of communion with Joy by turning inward after each chapter to consider their own current narrative. The need for this space is anticipated in the structure of the book, which provides questions for reflection and discussion alongside prayers for individual or communal use at the end of each chapter.

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