

Seeing a Different Joy

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1 – 11 and Jeremiah 15:16

Advent #3 12/12/21

A young girl shared what she wanted from her parents for her 16th birthday. She wanted a car and they bought her a car! It was a used clunker! The young girl was in shock! She was the oldest of four kids, she knew her parents did not have a lot of money. So what joy beamed from her face as she turned the keys in the ignition and took her car for her first ride!

But then, before she could pull out of the driveway, her father told her – ‘Now, wait darling. You need to understand we bought you this car because we want you to take your siblings to school. A smile still appeared on her face. She was still filled with joy!

In our reading from the Book of Isaiah, we find a message about a joy that is meant to be shared. As the Hebrew people returned from exile in Babylon, they discerned that their homeland is not exactly as they imagined it. Isaiah is asking them to see joy, a new joy!

This text also ask us - Do you want to know joy? If we do, we need to go to the place where folks are mostly oppressed, brokenhearted, and in bondage. And we need to become the light of God’s presence there. We need to show God’s favor and share. This will bring us and them joy!

It is quite a temptation during this time of year to be consumed with our family, our presents, and our own interest. But the calling of Advent always lead us out to share good news!

Joy is not always an emotion we feel. Life can be so hard in this broken landscape of ours. Illnesses come out of nowhere. Marriages end sooner than we would like. Friendships fizzle and fade. Pay cuts come at work. We read the latest headlines and wonder how we are going to make it out of bed each morning.

But a spiritual perspective on life asks us to make room for joy! We are called to make room for joy no matter what is going on in the world or in our home. We are promised that joy will return, even if we do not feel it now!

Do we believe God is good? If we do believe this, then joy is possible. God's justice will prevail in the end, although we might be asked to linger in the darkness longer than we would like.

In response to this promise of a coming redemption, God asks us to worship. God asks us to keep singing. God asks us to lift our heads and to turn our gaze from our circumstances toward the mystery of the Divine. If will do this, joy will reign!

Many of us have a hard time talking about sin, even in church. Sin is often a label we apply to some people, not us. We apply sin to the bad people!

Or sin is used to place a harsh judgement on our choices or the choices of others. We believe that God is love but we do not want that love to fall on 'those' people.

Knowing this about sin, we often just do not talk about sin.

However, as a pastor, I do not know how to talk about God's good news without talking about sin. Sin robs us of God's best. Sin takes from us the delight of being a human. Sin mares our image of Jesus Christ. Sin deprives us of joy!

King David spoke about how sin has led him on a joyless path in Psalm 51 when he said - *Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

King David spoke bluntly to God about his affair with Bathsheba and lying about it. King David spoke bluntly with God about arranging the death of her husband and his actions that brought about his death. David did not speak to God about joy, he asked God to not let sin be the end of his story. King David asked God – Give me a fresh start. Put my feet on a new journey. I want to know joy again! God forgave David and joy returned!

Here is the beauty of it all – restarts are possible! God’s grace abounds. Joy can always return. All we need to do is ask and joy shall return!

As Christmas nears, we might feel weariness as we light the candle of joy. Our to-do-list maybe very long, our extra cash is fast disappearing, and our grandchildren and children are hyped up on sugar, Santa Claus, and Christmas break from school. Many of us want a long Christmas nap, though Christmas is still days away.

Jeremiah 15:16 says – *Your words were found and I ate them, and your words became to me joy and the delight of my heart. I am calling your name, O Lord, God of Hosts.*

I hope these words bring us back to Advent. Jeremiah’s encouraging words should bring us joy and offer us an invitation to hear these words so that they become joy to us.

Jeremiah is God’s mouthpiece and he takes that responsibility very seriously. Jeremiah shares God’s words with his community and us so that we can live a purposeful life.

In the same way, our joy comes from living our life with a purpose to serve Jesus Christ. We need to know God and serve God wherever we find our feet planted today.

Let us not get so distracted by the things around us that we miss God's invitation. Our to-do-list can wait and it can be dramatically shorter when we let go of the stuff that is not part of God's best for us.

How many times have you heard this phrase – If you do not have anything nice to say about someone, do not say anything at all!

It can feel so good to gripe. It can feel so good to share that we have not been given our fair share. It can feel so good to complain about how our others are not supporting us. It can feel so good to speak negative words about the way our friends choose to parent their children. It can feel so good to say negative words of people of the other political party.

But when we choose to speak negatively, we open the door to bitterness. The resentment over what we think we should have, but do not, can leave an unpleasant trail. Especially during a season like Advent which is brimming with expectations and joy. It is easy for disappointment to creep in and ruin goodness quickly. When joy does find its way into our lives, we are also less likely to share it. A bitter heart does not know how to make the transition into joy. For ultimately, joy is a communal emotion!

To conclude this message, one last question – How comfortable do you feel telling others about what God has done in your life?

Is it something that comes naturally to you or are you more private about your faith. A simple act of giving praise to God for what God has done in your life can truly bring joy to you and others.

Isaiah testifies that the lord has given him salvation. Has the Lord given you the great gift of salvation? If you answer ‘YES’ to that question, then you cannot be silent! The act of testimony can move you into praise and joy. And this praise and joy can find a world longing for it. Joy will find wings in your words! Joy will find wings in your sharing!

Let us pray:

God, you have given us joy so that we can share it. As we move through this day, help us to see those who need some good news. Give us courage to be bearers of joy.

Good God, we thank you for being present in the hardest places of our journey. Give us joy to see what a beautiful tapestry you are weaving for all that is to come. May we be joyful and help us proclaim your goodness to all we meet.

Loving God, we want to taste more of your joy. We want our cups to brim in delight with what it means to be alive. Open our eyes to those joy zapping parts of our lives and teach us to confess our sins.

God, open up the bitter corners of our souls. Allow those places to receive a fresh wind of joy. Give us courage to move toward joy anew.

There is so much joy waiting to bubble up in our lives, let it overflow from within us and give us the courage to speak when called to so that we may testify to your glory. We pray this in the name of the One who gives us a great Joy, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

To conclude this message, Marc Theriault will be singing 'O Come, O Come Emmanuel' with two new verses written by Rev. Kevin Munroe on joy.