

Lesson: Isaiah 6:1-4, 8-11

Third Sunday of Advent

The Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28

December 13, 2020

Joy
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American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Grace and peace be to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ in the season of hope and peace and joy.

“*Don't worry be happy*” was a song that was popular several decades ago. If it was only that simple; life is more complex than that. We need more than a platitude, we need living relationships and by that I mean the relationship with God through Jesus Christ and deep relationships with one another. Joy is a word that describes that feeling, that exhilaration of being in relationship with God and others, so much more than being happy, as fun as that is. Happy relates to happenstance or the circumstances; things are good, things are bad, I'm good or bad, but joy is a depth of relationship word that describes an inner purpose, a state of being that describes that unity, love of God and love for one another.

I'm so thankful for this gift that it is a word of joy that has two aspects to it of recalling previous experiences of joy and foretelling or speaking of the future of great experiences of joy. I know in your life, you've had great experiences of joy. They can be small and subtle or they can be wonderful mountaintop experiences but that joy of being in relationship with God and one another; a marriage, your marriage, that wonderful feeling of joy, of being united in love. The birth of a child, a miracle, thank giving to God and to your spouse and to the love of life now in this precious child, other experiences of joy you've had in your life. It's important to recall those experiences. Psalm 126 says it this way “Recalls when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, then we were like those who dream, our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy.” The Lord has acted in your life. The Lord has acted in the life of this congregation. Joy has been an experience and even in the midst of the pandemic concern no one can take away the depth of relationship that we've had and will have, because that's the second part of Psalm 126, this forth telling or asking for God's in-breaking again and it says it this way. “Restore our fortunes O Lord, like the water courses of the Negev fill again this desert with your water, with your righteousness.” It is a beautiful description, that we know that there will be great joy again for myself.

I'm a Lutheran, so joy looks pretty inhibited, I've seen it in church, would we ever raise a hand, well maybe if we had a question; other groups have hands or double hands, or a variety of different expressions. We don't need to be like them, but the joy we have is often kind of subtle. I get a kick out of that, God's frozen chosen is one way I've heard Lutherans described. I want to say this, I cannot wait until we have uninhibited worship. Watch out, I'm not trying to say anything more about that than this - to be able to fill this sanctuary together and to be able to sing and shout praises of acclamation and to be with one another without the fear that we now often have. Fear for good reasons to prevent the spread of disease, but oh my goodness Lord, restore us back to this worship center, a place of your love and joy that cannot be taken away. We've had that experience and we will have that experience, 2021 is already now in our vision. We know that it will take a while for the vaccine to be distributed. We know that we need to continue

safe practices. We know we need to continue to care for one another and love one another, but we see these signs of hope. We have a peace that comes from the love of God and with joy we are looking forward to 2021. That is a statement that not every organization says.

We've been spending time talking about 2021 and a lot of it goes to, I think, the Gospel reading for today about clarity of purpose and clarity of mission. There is a joy when God uses us and we, with abandon, without threat or concern, unite in mission together to proclaim the love of God in our precious music ministry and continue to invest into the best that we can to express in musical joy our love of God through Jesus Christ. To be a blessing, to step forward when many others are pulling back, but we want to step forward and to be even more helpful to missions such as Pan De Veda and to the Grand Canyon Synod, to step forward and to be a blessing in our words and in our deeds and actions with ministry resources. The last is inviting, invite in life vitality.

In our own members, last weekend we had seven more Stephen ministers commissioned after worship. People invited to share their gifts and to learn and to grow for the sake of serving others in this congregation and for community members, It is an awesome experience to see people's lives be enlivened because they were asked and received the request as a blessing to use their life to serve others in honor of God's mission. This invitation continues in our neighborhood groups. I've been to neighborhood groups, it's amazing. I will show up where there's food and coffee, so I've been to neighborhood groups; but we've had to suspend that, but in 2021 a reinvigoration of our neighborhood groups, as it becomes safe to gather. The joy of fellowship, the joy of being together will come forward.

The last part of 2021, will have an invitation for all of us to join together to complete years 22, 23 and 24 leading to our 50th anniversary in 2025 is to pay down our debt, burn the mortgage and together invite and participate with joy and purpose. These are the things that give joy because a clarity of mission. The people were asking who John was, "Who are you? Let us have an answer, who are you?" If that question comes to us we say that we are called by God to proclaim the love of Jesus Christ and to invite others into this faith community. I say both our members to be engaged and for those that will be new members and to be a blessing in word and deed. That's who we are and there is a joy when the mission is that clear. There is missional clarity, we know who we are, we know whose we are, we know who will be serving and there is great joy. Will 2021 be a year of the Lord's favor? The answer is yes, the Lord will restore our fortunes, our common lot together always to proclaim and invite and to bless. It will be an awesome experience.

It speaks in the scriptures about those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy. I look ahead and when we are filled and gathered and praising God, I think I will be, I know there will be tears, but they will be tears of joy. I am so thankful for God who loves so fully, so completely. It is a marvelous experience to be with you at this time. May God continue to strengthen us in the clarity of our mission and love for God and love for one another for his sake, Amen