

Rev. Janet Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
Third Sunday in Advent
December 12, 2021
Scripture: Psalm 126; Luke 1: 39-49

Sermon: It's The Most Wonderful Time of The Year: Gift of Joy

Joy is such a wonderful emotion. Scientists generally define joy as a positive emotion where you have feelings of freedom, safety, and ease, that generally arises in response to something good happening in your life or in the world.

Emily Dickinson wrote, "Find ecstasy in life, the mere sense of living is joy enough." The poet Rumi wrote, "When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy." Author Iris Murdoch, said, "People from a planet without flowers would think we must be mad with joy the whole time to have such things about us."

Joy can come from connection with ourselves, with the people in our lives, with the world around us, with nature and with the present moment.

The benefits of joy are extraordinary—not just for yourself, but for those around you also. What does it mean to have true joy and how do we get joy? Joy flows from the inside out. Something inside you bubbles up and flows out of your heart in shouts of song, praise and great delight in something or someone.

The joy that the world offers is a pale imitation of the true joy only knowing God can give us. The joy, or happiness, we should call it, that unsaved people experience is a temporary joy that comes and goes depending on the situation that person is in at the time. If things are going well there is a feeling of happiness and when things are difficult there is no joy or happiness. There can be no true joy apart from God. Sin is the only thing that can steal our joy and separate us from God.

Traditionally, this Third Sunday of Advent is called ***Gaudete*** Sunday, from the Latin for ***JOY*** and it is a day for rejoicing. The world is

a difficult, dark, sinful place but Jesus came to give us hope, peace and joy so we could live victoriously in a dark world of brokenness. On this Third Sunday in Advent, we are admonished to rejoice. This Season of hope can make you smile and laugh and bring joy to our hearts. We know what happens at Christmas—Emmanuel, God with us, comes to bring us hope, peace and joy. Jesus has come to bring us Good News. When we know Emmanuel, we have joy because we know what happens at Easter is also good, because that is why he came.

Joy feels natural this time of year. It is the time to give gifts and to receive the greatest gift, Jesus, who fills us with joy. In the midst of the darkness and the brokenness of the world there is still hope in Jesus; there is still peace in Jesus and there is still joy in Jesus.

Our Advent candle today is pink, not purple, like the other three. The purple candles are meant to represent the royalty of Jesus being the Prince of Peace. It also means repentance of God's people and the turning away from what is of sin and towards new life. The pink candle, a mixture of purple and white from the Christ Candle is transformed and brings joy to the darkness, transforming the world. We stand here today where pain and hope meet, and God fills us with Joy. The Joy of the Lord is our Strength in the best of times and in the worst of times. You can still be a joyful person and still cry for the brokenness of the world.

If we choose to thank God for the indescribable gift of salvation through Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, perhaps we could learn to recapture the joy of Christmas everyday of our lives. We need not fear the future because of the miracle of Christmas. If we have responded to the gospel—the good news about Jesus offering us salvation—we too can experience a victory over the grave and have eternal life. That is reason enough for us to leap for joy.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, said, "The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect and who look forward to something greater to come."

The Biblical definition of joy says that "joy is a feeling of good pleasure and happiness that is dependent on who Jesus is rather than on who we are or what is happening around us. Joy comes from the Holy Spirit, abiding in God's presence and from Hope in his word."

Philippians 4:4 says, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”

Biblical joy is knowing Jesus and rejoicing in him. Jesus wants a relationship with us and has given us his Holy Spirit so that we can hear his voice and know him. When we draw close to him, we can feel his peace beyond understanding, contentment in any situation and even experience healing in his presence.

Psalms 16: 11 says, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

God says in his word that he will never leave us or forsake us, he will strengthen us, he will comfort us, and bring us peace. He is near to the brokenhearted and wants to bless us and keep us close to him. Knowing God’s promises is important and believing, so joy will be planted deep into our hearts with God.

Romans 15:13 tells us, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”

So, joy is a gift from God when you believe. Joy comes from the presence of God in your life. Joy is one of the Fruit of the Spirit; so, joy comes from being filled with his Holy Spirit. Joy comes from knowing the Word of God and reading and studying his word.

When the “Joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10), God’s joy can be the exact thing that gives you strength to keep going. You can stand strong because you have God’s joy flowing in you and through you and God’s joy gives you endurance. Joy from the Lord gives you the ability to stand up and stand under the trials and circumstances of life.

There is a difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is because of and Joy is in spite of. Happiness comes as a result of the things that are happening in your life. ***This comes from the outside in. Joy on the other hand is in spite of.*** While things are happening around you, joy is not dependent on those things. Joy flows from inside of you and it has the ability to sustain you even if nothing on the outside gives

you a reason to rejoice. This is why you can rejoice in the midst of trials, hardships, and difficult times.

The Whos down in Who-ville, in the story ***How the Grinch Stole Christmas***, didn't let their circumstances stop Christmas from coming. Not even the Grinch could take away their joy.

"The Grinch got a wonderful, awful idea!" He dressed up like Santa Claus and took all the Whos decorations, gifts and food at night while they were asleep. The Grinch said, "They're finding out now that no Christmas is coming! They're just waking up! I know just what they'll do! Their mouths will hang open a minute or two then the Whos down in Who-ville will all cry BOO-HOO!" "So, he paused. And the Grinch put his hand to his ear. And he did hear a sound rising over the snow. It started in low. Then it started to grow. But the sound wasn't sad! Why, this sound sounded merry! It couldn't be so! But it WAS merry! VERY! Every Who down in Who-ville, the tall and the small, was singing! Without any presents at all! He HADN'T stopped Christmas from coming! IT CAME! Somehow or other, it came just the same!"

The Whos were rejoicing and still had joy in their hearts without all the ribbons, tags, packages, boxes or bags and when the Grinch saw their JOY, his heart grew three sizes that day.

The JOY of the Lord can be contagious, and others will know that we are Christians because of the joy in our hearts and the love we receive being called Children of God.

Our job as followers of Christ is to spread the joy of the Lord. Those in our world who do not know Jesus do not have this eternal joy.

Live as people who believe that this joy, and the child who brings it, can change the world.

When God is the source of your joy there is nothing in this world that can ever take it away.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice!"