

December 13, 2020
Third Sunday in Advent

“Reflections on Joy”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 61:1-4

*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.
For I the LORD love justice,*

Luke 1:46b-55

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”
And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.*

SERMON: Reflections on Joy

One of the things I am continually amazed by is how we can relate to scriptures that were written in a far away land, in a different tongue, over 2500 years ago. But here we are again with this passage in Isaiah.

The Israelites like us, have been in exile and are on the precipice of big change. Of course their exile was on a much bigger scale, exiled from their country not just from being able to gather together in person. They have been captives to the Babylonians and the Babylonian empire is about to fall. But by this time in their exile they have felt like God has abandoned them for so long, they have started to believe it. They are surrounded by the chaos of political strife and they have all but given up, feeling like God has all but given up on them.

Those are the people that are being addressed in this particular part of Isaiah but the author says in essence "I have good news folks, God has not given up on you! God has sent me to tell you this nightmare is almost over. Soon God will bind up the broken hearted, those who mourn will be comforted and you people, well God will use you, you people who are as strong as giant oaks, God will use you to rebuild and repair what is left in ruins." Rick Morley put it this way "Our God is a God who builds up and restores. Who makes all things new. And, God invites us along, to pick up a hammer and get to work rebuilding and refashioning the world around us."

The author of Isaiah never pulls the focus from God. He claims to be an instrument of the good news but the good news is that God is still with them and soon they will be free. Fast forward 500 years and we see the same humility in Mary. Her cousin Elizabeth right before the passage read has given her a great compliment. She says "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb".

But Mary says, no, my soul magnifies God that is all. It is God doing all the work, through me. And God is going to do many wonderful things, lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things.

Both of these passages tell us God will do great things through us when we give God access to our lives and who does God want us to do great things for? The suffering... the captives, the poor, the lowly, the broken hearted, those who mourn, and the hungry. And then we know the deep, abiding, ever present Joy that comes from service to God by serving each other.

You know what I'm talking about, that buzz that comes from doing something nice for someone. The buzz you got when you drop of food at the food pantry, or you call someone who you think might be lonely or isolated. Not just at Christmas, but you all do it all year long. The joy you feel in giving gifts but also the joy in being the gift. Giving your time and attention to someone who is hurting. The joy you get in doing the work of justice, knowing that is what "God Loves" like Isaiah said.

Walt Bruggeman writes about the “Joy” of advent. “It is not to be confused with our commercialized exuberance at Christmas. Nor is it “Christmas joy” that comes in a bottle. Rather Christmas joy, is a deep, glad confidence that God’s good will for the world will outrun all of our troubles and tribulations.”

When this time in our history has passed there will be much rebuilding to do. There will be many people suffering the economic toll, the loss of a job, or their home, there will be many grieving the loss of someone dear, there will be people who are still struggling medically long after the virus has left their body. God is going to need us, and there are so many that need God. Each of you has been anointed by the holy spirit, by your baptism, to share the good news. Each one of you has been called to bind up the broken hearted and to help rebuild and restore.

Let that fill you with joy and excitement this Christmas Season, knowing that our healing is about to be birthed. That God is going to use us in our community, and that there will be many opportunities for our souls to Magnify the Lord. For now, we stay home, we wait, but on the other side of this we get to be a part of God’s healing. We get to be a part of sharing the good news that God is with us, Immanuel. We wait but not much longer now, we wait but we wait with joy. AMEN

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