

December 13, 2015 Third Sunday of Advent

Lighting the Advent Wreath

The Goldstons

Isaiah 12.5-6

*Reader: Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously;
let this be known in all the earth.*

*Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.*

One: In the beginning was the Word—
spoken and breathed,
a promise made and kept.

**All: Persevere in hope, keep the faith—
God's promise is true!**

One: The Word was in the beginning,
and through him all things come into being.

**All: Eternal and near at hand,
Already and not-yet,
God's promise is the foundation of all life.**

One: Keep going!
Persevere in joy, giving voice to God's presence yet again.
~candle is lit~

Prayer of the Day

God of our Highest Joy,
we come to you this day as your servants,
gathered to worship you and you alone.
As we continue this Advent journey,
help us to focus on you and the coming of your son, Jesus.
Amidst the commercials, the cooking, and the company,
help us to remember the true meaning of this season:
that you would come to us in the flesh and forever live among us.

Call to Confession

Prayer of Confession

**Forgive us, Lord, for times when joy was lost,
And moments when we never thought to laugh,
For times when we obsess and despair,
And all forget your steadfast love and care.
Forgive, forgive, forgive us all our sins,
and help us live in joy that never ends.**

Assurance of Pardon (please use last week!)

Responsive Reading: ISAIAH 12:2-6

Surely God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid,
**for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.**

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day:
**Give thanks to the LORD,
call on his name;
make known his deeds among the nations;
proclaim that his name is exalted.**

Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;
let this be known in all the earth.
**Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.**

Prayers of the People

God of our Highest Joy,
we come to you this day as your servants,
gathered to worship you and you alone.
As we continue this Advent journey,
help us to focus on you and the coming of your son, Jesus.
Amidst the commercials, the cooking, and the company,
help us to remember the true meaning of this season:
that you would come to us in the flesh and forever live among us.

Even as we share the joy we find in you with one another,
we are mindful of those for whom joy is hard to find,
for those who don't have enough clothes,
for those who don't have enough food,
for those who don't have enough (or any) shelter,
for those who don't have enough protection and justice.
We confess that there really is "enough" for everyone,
but it is our fault that the "enough" is hoarded by few at the expense of many.
Help us to bear the good fruit that the Baptist called us to bear,
being mindful of those around us without during this season of giving.

We pray this day for those longing for spiritual renewal.
We would ask that your Holy Spirit invigorate us
that we may provide for others first
before expecting them to provide for us.
Come to this place and encourage us to do the work
to which we were baptized.
Help us to proclaim the Good News in word and in deed.

We pray this day for the hope we have found,
the peace we seek,
and the joy we will receive in your Holy name.
May we bring hope to the hopeless,
peace to the restless,
and joy to those who crave it.
We pray this day, either out loud or in our hearts, for those dear to us...

Gracious God, may the joy we find not be a commodity to be hoarded
but a gift to be shared with one another.
We thank you for your presence among us,
your creation around us,
and your providence within us,
as we continue this blessed journey. Amen.

Zephaniah 3:14-20

¹⁴Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
¹⁵The LORD has taken away the judgments against you,
he has turned away your enemies.
The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.
¹⁶On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.
¹⁷The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing
¹⁸as on a day of festival.
I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.
¹⁹I will deal with all your oppressors at that time.
And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.
²⁰At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the LORD.

Philippians 4:4-7

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Luke 3:7-18

⁷John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

¹⁰And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" ¹¹In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." ¹²Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" ¹³He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

¹⁵As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

¹⁸So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Sermon: "Mary Said Yes"

Every year in the city of Vienna, Virginia, people from miles around converge with blankets, thermoses of cocoa, and the all-important jingle bells, and they pack into the majestic 7,000-seat amphitheater called the Filene Center. The theater is at Wolf Trap National Park and it is a beautiful theater of Douglas fir and Southern Yellow Pine, set at the foot of a steeply rising hill, where spectators also spread out their blankets in the December chill, bundled in coats.

Why? To sing, of course!

This event has been going on for at least 30 years and is a dear memory of yours truly, who looked forward to the fun, jingling the bells to every song, watching this happy man dressed head to toe in red dancing about on stage leading us in song. A band plays the music live behind him. And, Santa Claus drops by, to the delight of children and adults alike!

Music, they say, makes the world go round. Especially this time of year.

We are told by the Presbyterian Book of Confessions that the chief aim of humans is to "worship God and enjoy him forever." That is our primary vocation, every one of us, no matter your age, height, breadth or depth. And for this Third Sunday of Advent we are finally given a chance to lift our hearts up from the weeks of preparation and repentance, and rejoice!

It can be hard for all of us from time to time, even this time of year to manage to rejoice. Some people have a blue Christmas, as Cassie Huffman reminded us just yesterday at the Health Talk. And she suggests we should pay attention to when we think negatively about something and to replace it with something positive. Fresh air, a walk around, singing...something to change how we feel.

Maybe we should take a lesson from Mary, the mother of Jesus. She said a positive Yes to God, when she discovered her entire life was about to change. It wasn't going to go the way

she and Joseph had planned it. She was about to risk bearing the embarrassment of becoming an unwed pregnant girl. She was going to have a baby earlier than she and Joseph were planning. And not only that, she said Yes to the extraordinary, astonishing miracle of becoming pregnant with the baby destined for greatness. An awesome responsibility, she must have at times felt a little fear at it. I don't know how she must have felt, but the news that she would give birth to a king probably didn't elicit the same kind of excitement that you'd have if you find out you just won the Powerball lottery.

Now, Mary didn't have a big choice in the matter, but she still responded with the right attitude, saying "Yes" - "Let it be unto me as you have said." She answered the call.

Maybe that's how we are called to embrace this important purpose we have to rejoice. Through perseverance in the hard things, frightening things, uncertainty - like Mary - we can respond with a Yes and rejoice in it. What it takes is our determination to be positive about all that God asks of us, trusting he will not ask us to do what is impossible. It might be a challenge, but it is not impossible. John the Baptist challenges his listeners, to live their lives differently knowing that the Messiah is coming. When they ask him, "What shall we do?" He tells everyone to share their coats and their food. And he tells the tax collectors, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." To the soldiers he says, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages." All the while John has been preaching the Good News. This is, friends, Good News. Not bad. So John the Baptist I think was saying to live your life differently - not because you should be afraid to get caught in sin - do it because you are celebrating with joy the salvation that is coming. Jesus is coming - start living with peace and goodwill towards all - for joy!

All we do - all the good we do to serve God, to worship God, to give presents and sing songs and have parties at Christmas - we do these things NOT because we have to. We do them because we are glad for Jesus in our lives. Because the Good News about Jesus is truly GOOD News - AWESOME News. It is something we should be celebrating at every turn. All the forms of service and ministry we do as a church - is not because we have to do it - it is because of our joy for Jesus.

Our calling is joy. Say Yes to God, not because you are supposed to. Say Yes to God today, for it is our pleasure to serve the one who brings salvation to the world! Thanks be to God for that. Alleluia! Amen.