

“Joy”

Luke 2:1 – 12; Phil 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16

Philippians 4:4:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

1 Thessalonians 5:16:

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

So this morning we are in the third Sunday of Advent.

If you are like myself, you may come from Christian tradition where Advent and lighting of candles is what those “other” churches do.

Advent means “coming” or “arrival” and the actual practice of marking of the weeks leading to Christmas Day began somewhere in the 400’s AD.

Candle lighting arose in the 1800’s to mark each Sunday leading to Christmas Day.

Each candles represents to the gifts associated with Jesus coming into the world – hope, peace, joy and love.

It is a time of preparation.

So how is your preparation going?

Give yourself 1 point for each:

- Put up the Christmas tree
- Sent Christmas cards
- Bought presents
- Decided on the menu
- Cleaned out freezer
- Bought food for Christmas Day
- Invited guests or responded to invitations
- 5 Bonus points – you’ve had your pre-Christmas swim in the lake.

So today is as the third Sunday in Advent as we prepare ourselves to celebrate Christmas, and it is signalled by... Joy.

Joy is the laughter, the happiness, the lightness of Spirit, the ability to not take oneself too seriously and most all revel in Jesus and all that comes from Him.

You know, joy is the exuberance and lightness of spirit found in Christ. With joyful people there is a genuine levity they carry about with them. There is a lightness of step.

It's a mark of the Christian life.

Our reading from 1 Thessalonians gives us three: prayer, gratitude and rejoicing or joy are marks of the Christian life.

It's a fruit of the Holy Spirit; an attribute of a life given over to the Spirit of God.

Joy is cultivated in us as the Spirit is at work.

We are *commanded* to rejoice.

Paul says to the church in Philippi, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

We are commanded to find joy *in* the Lord. That's why I singing songs of worship is so important.

As a mark of the Christian life there is joy that is pure gift as the shepherds experienced on the first Christmas.

A message of great joy for all people – the Messiah, the deliverer, rescuer has been born. God has kept his promise.

The shepherds response? The help but tell other people. The go back praising and glorifying God.

Joy is response to an unexpected good.

So joy – joy that's especially and rightfully emphasised during Advent and Christmas – is a mark of what it means to know and follow Jesus.

Yet we know that this joy can be elusive and even absent.

Sometimes it evaporates.

The joy we receive and experience because Jesus takes a battering.

The result is joylessness and we can become sullen, solemn, dejected, dour, and even cynical.

I think these though are not the source but a symptom of something deeper.

The thing is, there are enemies of joy.
There are joy killers.

So, ***what are the enemies of joy?***

I'll give you three: 2 briefly and one at length.

I think that one of the enemies of joy is quite simply *sin*.
Sin that lingers and festers in the background of our lives.
Unconfessed sin.

The Psalmist says how his sin is so corrosive.
It wearies the soul. It robs of joy.
Yet we know that a saviour, a Saviour, has been born.
So the Psalmist can say how happy, or joyous, is the one whose transgressions are forgiven.

Another is that we think our greatest joy can be found *outside* of who God is and what he has accomplished.
It could be a career, our families, sporting or academic achievement.
It could be anything.
We think joy is found there BUT it *never* satisfies.
The happiness and joy is so short lived.

A third enemy is that we find at this times that we're burdened by life.
We're carrying stuff: emotionally and mentally.
Weighed down.
We're carrying stuff like a heavy load.

And what I've experienced, what I've found is when we're weighed down – with a weight too heavy to carry in our souls – it robs us of the joy found in Christ.

So how do you know if your burdened, that you're carrying stuff?
Tell the person next to you.

"How do you know if you're burdened?"

Okay, get your checklist out:

- You don't sleep well.
You may wake up in the middle of the night thinking about an issue or issues or it may even invade your dreams.
- Another: you feel it's weight almost physically.
A weight on you mind becomes like a weight on your body.
The shoulders slump.
So you feel it's weight.. and it also takes your focus.

There are such things as tension headaches

- Here's one and I want you to hear this: you sigh a lot.
sigh
We all sigh at times but when you're burdened it's constant.
- Then there are some people and they fire up, at everyone and everything.
Everything and everyone's a problem!
- Jesus said, "Out of the mouth the heart speaks" and out the mouth comes all sorts of complaints... that find their source in your burden.

You see being burdened saps the joy out of your life.

The lead up to Christmas can be a burden.

One of things about this time of year is there are always surveys.

A survey asked about the most stressful aspects of Christmas.

Here are the top 10 – see any resonate with you:

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|---|-----|
| Having to be nice: | 15% |
| Having to attend holiday parties or events: | 16% |
| Disappointing gifts: | 19% |
| Seasonal music: | 23% |
| Seeing certain relatives: | 24% |
| Travelling: | 25% |
| Gift shopping: | 28% |
| Getting into debt: | 37% |
| Gaining weight: | 37% |
| Crowds and long queues: | 68% |

For many Christmas is one of the worst times of the year.

One poll suggested in the UK there are 3 million family fights each Christmas, ranging from verbal to the physical altercations.

A psychiatrist wrote a newspaper article entitled, 'Cheer up, it will soon all be over.'

He has this final piece of advice: 'Remember that Christmas, although recurrent, doesn't last forever.'

So what do you do?

Sometimes stuff like that doesn't go away quickly.

It's lingers.

And then you may find this: it takes on a new life of its own.

Then you find it sits there in the background of everything you do.

It's no longer an inconvenience – it's a burden, an imposing presence that you bear 24 hours a day, 7 days of the week.

So what do you do (if you're carrying a burden)?

If you feel comfortable, tell the person next to you.

Okay so imagine this bucket is your life:



The water that fills the bucket is the life and hope and peace and JOY that comes from knowing Jesus.

Unlike a normal bucket, when it's full of the joy that Jesus gives, it is light.

However when you are carrying a burden, like rocks in a bucket, the burdens displace your life and hope and peace and joy found in Jesus.

As I mentioned feel you feel it psychologically and emotionally but also at times physically.

And our joy in following Jesus becomes impeded.
You can't live lightly.
So for me there are times when I lose my joy because I've taken on a burden I'm not meant to carry.

The longer we hold on to them, the heavier they become.

So what do you do?

What you need to do is to delve into your bucket and pull out and name that which has become a burden to for.

It may be a hurt.
You've been hurt and it's hard to let go.

It may be a resentment.
It could be from hurt or words said, that you've not let go.

It could be a failure.

It could be in the area of regret.
Some people carry regrets with them for years and even decades.
 "If only I'd done things differently..."
 "If only I'd made a better business decision".
 "If only I'd been a better parent".

It could be in the area of relationships.

It could be parent.
Maybe a parent is causing you concern or grief.
It could be a spouse.
It could be a concern about a child.

Maybe an adult child is not walking with Lord despite your best efforts.
And you're beating yourself up.

Maybe it's a big decision you have to make.
Some decisions are just overwhelmingly huge.

It could be work or employment related.

It could be school.

It could be loss. Loss and grief come in many different forms.

Loss of partner through death or relationship breakdown.

Loss of employment. Loss of friendships.

For many pastors and ministers and leaders it's often the local church.

They can feel the great weight of church's health and future weight heavily on their shoulders.

They have deep loving concern for the people they shepherd.

The expectations can pile up.

Whatever it is, you're carrying it like an unbearable weight.

So you delve into your bucket and you've named it - what do you do then?

You take it the one who is the source and true lasting joy.

The one who says:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

It's not something that you can rush, and it takes courage.