

Rejoicing

Hope is Born: Part 3 “Rejoicing”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – December 13th, 2020

3rd Sunday of Advent

Readings: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

Reflection: Psalm 126

Greeting: A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

Lighting the Advent Candle: The second Sunday of Advent we light the candle of peace in each step of the journey. “Our mouths were suddenly filled with laughter; our tongues were filled with joyful shouts. It was even said, at that time, among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them! Yes, the Lord has done great things for us, and we are overjoyed.’” (Psalm 126:2-3 CEB+) *The second candle is lit.*

Prayer: Eternal God, in your providence you made all ages a preparation for the kingdom of your Son. Make ready our hearts for the brightness of your glory and the fullness of your blessing in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 126

When the LORD changed Zion’s circumstances for the better, it was like we had been dreaming. Our mouths were suddenly filled with laughter; our tongues were filled with joyful shouts. It was even said, at that time, among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them!” Yes, the LORD has done great things for us, and we are overjoyed. LORD, change our circumstances for the better, like dry streams in the desert waste! Let those who plant with tears reap the harvest with joyful shouts. Let those who go out, crying and carrying their seed, come home with joyful shouts, carrying bales of grain!
(Psalm 126 CEB+)

We read the words of Psalm 126 and hear of God’s grace and joy. That God can transform our lives. We hear a call to be thankful for all that God has done. Do we glorify the Lord for all the good that we see? Do we give prayers of thanks for all the blessing that we have received? How do we share those blessings with others? In what way can we share the joy God has given us? Do we call on God to help us with all things?

Prayer: Oh Lord, prepare our hearts in this season of advent. Bring us closer to you in all that we are. Help us to remember our Savior born into this world so that we may know your great love for us. Help us this season as we find hope in you. Help us to rejoice in your steadfast love and faithfulness that we may celebrate you, Lord. Bring us together in your joy and your mercy, that we may be born anew into your grace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 61, verses 1 through 4 and 8 through 11.

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, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

(Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 NRSV)*

Our next reading is from 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verses 16 through 24.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

(1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 NRSV)*

Our final reading is from John, chapter 1, verses 6 through 8 and 19 through 28.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask

him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.
(John 1:6-8, 19-28 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week's message for our Advent series, Hope is Born, is about rejoicing. And I think there's a lot to be thankful for and a lot to rejoice about, even when things are not looking so great. And I was especially reminded of this as I ended up taking ill this week, and not feeling my best. But I had plenty to be thankful for and plenty to celebrate. And as we prepare our hearts for hope, for this joy, and for this piece that Christmas is, I think it's important that we recognize all that we have to rejoice over. In our reading today in First Thessalonians we have Paul's words. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." That the spirit is in us to give us a spirit that can rejoice for all that we've been given. For all the things that we have to celebrate. And I was thinking about this over the last week as I dealt with all of the things surrounding not feeling well. I dealt with school and all that comes with that and trying to get everything ready. I enjoyed being able to stop and just think about all the good that God has done in my life. That even when I'm not feeling my best, I still have plenty to be thankful for and plenty to celebrate. And I could rest when I needed to because I had that peace that God gives that said, you know what, you can take it easy and things will be alright. And I think sometimes we miss that. We miss that in Advent because we're so busy getting ready. And it's almost like we are waiting to celebrate. That we're waiting too long because we have things right here and right now that give us cause to rejoice.

I think about John in our Gospel reading for today. We have that John was sent to testify to the light. And when John has asked who he is, John very much says first of all who he's not. I'm not the Messiah. I'm not Elijah. I'm not any of those things that you think I am. We get the verse from Isaiah that we had last week. Who is John? The voice of one crying out "make straight the way of the Lord." It could end there but they want to know more. Well, what are you doing then? Why are you baptizing people? And that's because there's something more to come. And that's something to celebrate. John could be upset. He's not the one everybody's looking for. But he's going to shout the way there. He's going to be the voice crying out. The one who brings people in and baptizes them and says somebody more is coming. Be glad. Something big is going to happen, something good. And we can celebrate that now. I think it's

important that we get the idea of being able to say, yes, this is going to be good, and we can be happy about it today. Because we can be happy about things yet to come. And you know, I can't help but feel after having gone in and getting tested, and thankfully it came back negative, that we do live in a time of great stress and great worry and great concern. We've got plenty of things to worry about and obsess over. But we still have plenty of things to be happy about.

Now, we may not be here to worship in the church building, and we may not be for some time. And I could dwell on that. I could let it get me down. Or I could celebrate that we are still connected, and that we are still together in Christ. That whether or not we are here in this building doesn't change that we are together in him. And to me, that's the important part. And I'm reminded of all this in Isaiah. "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." We get a picture of everything being made new, being made good, because God is still with us. Even when things are rough. Because of God's great love. That God has clothed me with the garments of salvation. That's a wonderful feeling. That God is there to give us hope, even in times of trouble, and remind us that we still have plenty to celebrate. Even when things aren't going how we expected them to go.

And, you know, I thought about this a lot. Having time where I could only sit and reflect because I didn't have the energy to do much else. I could think about all the things that I wasn't getting done. But I could also think about all the good that was still in my life. That there's lots of things that we have missed out on this year. There's lots of things that didn't go the way we expected them to go. Lots of things that didn't happen the way we wanted them to happen. But that doesn't mean that God isn't with us. It doesn't mean we've lost hope. It just means we're taking a different path. So instead of setting my sights on all the things that I wished could be, I've set my sights on the things that I can do and what can be, knowing that Christmas will still come. That Christ is still born on Christmas Day to set us free, and that gives us cause to rejoice. Our Emmanuel, God with us. God residing with us, in us, that we have that hope that never goes away. No matter how bad things get, God is with us. And that's enough to make me pause and think, that's good. That's good. I may still not have all the energy I wish that I had and I'm already feeling better.

I could be thankful that my kids were of a huge help this week. Because they're still excited. And I've learned a lot from them over this last year, about being able to find the good amongst all the bad. They still look ahead to things that they want to do. And they aren't jaded, thinking that they'll never happen. They're patiently waiting. Because the hope never goes out. Being able to spend time with family and friends, being able to do all the things they want to do. Yet they still find joy in what they do every day. I tell you, all three of my kids have been an inspiration in this time, reminding me that there's always going to be light in the darkness. And that it's up to us to testify to that light. To be like John. I'm not the Messiah. I'm not Elijah. But it

doesn't stop me from celebrating the one who's coming. It doesn't stop me from celebrating the birth of a Savior born to set us free. It doesn't stop me from having hope. And all those who suffer, being set free from suffering. All those in bondage or being set free. All those who are downtrodden, being lifted up. Every yoke broken. That our bondage to sin and death is shattered by Christ. That we prepare our hearts to celebrate that love that sets us free. That we prepare our hearts for the joy that Christ brings to us so that we can bring that joy to others.

And that it's not just about a day. But it's the day that reminds us about a life. A day that reminds us about how we should live. Not knowing where the next hope will come from, but always looking for it. Never knowing when the ups and downs may come. But always celebrating what God has given us. And always being able to be happy that we are loved by our Savior for the gift that has already been given. So in this time of preparation, remember to celebrate that time as well. Rejoice in the goodness that God has given us. Rejoice in the light that will always outshine the darkness. Rejoice in the hope that we have that never goes away because Christ is with us. And be glad for all that we have, in this life and the next. That we may rejoice in Christ our Savior being born into this world set us free. We may celebrate his love entering into our lives daily. We rejoice in the hope of what is yet to come. Knowing that through it all, our Emmanuel, God with us, will always be there. And if we can't rejoice in that I don't know what we can rejoice in. So, as we prepare our hearts in this season of Advent let us always be rejoicing in the love of the Father and the care of the Son and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: Lord Jesus Christ, you are the way of peace. Com into the brokenness of our lives and our land with your healing love. Help us to be willing to bow before you in true repentance, and to bow to one another in real forgiveness. By the fire of your Holy Spirit, melt our hard hearts and consume the pride and prejudice which separate us. Fill us, O Lord, with your perfect love, which casts out our fear, and bind us together in that unity which you share with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: We go forth now as a people of hope. We go with the blessings of the Father, in the peace of the Son, in communion with the Holy Spirit. Until we meet again.
Amen.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Eric Veach	Cathy Devall
Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen
Don Stewart	Anne Winkler Heinrichs		Michael & Makenzie Reynolds
Ronnie Winstead	John Millsap	Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons
Trinity Powers	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Family of Lois Woolever	Mary White
Nick Nichols	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams
Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte
Kim Hennes	Residents of the Greenup Nursing Center		

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Our Current Series – Hope is Born

This series is our Advent series of how Christ coming into the world fills us with hope.

November 29th – *Waiting* – Our first advent lesson is about learning to wait.

December 6th – *Preparing* – We are a people who prepare for the coming of the Lord.

December 13th – *Rejoicing* – God gives us reason to rejoice in all things.

December 20th – *Expecting* – We await what we know has come and is coming.

December 24th – *Becoming* – We not only celebrate hope, but we become it.

12/13/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron

Greetings! I'm returning with a weekly update this week because of a change in our situation here in Illinois.

We are suspending in person worship until further notice from the Bishop.

I would like to have as many people as would like to be involved in the Christmas Eve service to have that chance. If you would like to do a scripture reading, a special reading, a prayer, or a song, I would be happy to include it with the service this Christmas Eve! I know this is going to be different, but it is still Christmas.

I would also like to know if you'd like to get a DVD of the Christmas Eve service. If there is interest, I would like to know with enough time to get the discs made and sent out or given to someone to deliver. I am looking for as many ways to be able to include everyone in this service as I can.

I have not been feeling well this last week, but I did get tested for Covid and it came back negative. As such, mailings are going out late this week. Thankfully, I am feeling better now.

If you know someone who would like to receive printed information every week, please let me know. If you come to this online, feel free to share it.

The church is still active and working, and as such, still needs your financial support. Please contact me or the church treasurer for options. Thank you for your continued support.

Please see the CDC website for information on the Coronavirus or the IDHP website for information about the current Illinois situation and restrictions.

Please stay safe. You are all in my prayers. I will keep you updated as best I can. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your Church Council Chair or myself.

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