

## **The Joy of Home**

Come Home for Christmas: Part 3 “The Joy of Home”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – December 12, 2021

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

**Readings:** Zephaniah 3:14-20; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

**Reflection:** Psalm 126

**Greeting:** Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace, good will toward men! (*Luke 2:14*)

**Prayer:** O God everlasting, the prophets spoke your word so the path to your salvation could be made known with the message of repentance. Be with us this day and prepare our hearts to receive your love. Strengthen us in faith that we may celebrate the birth of our Savior. Warm our hearts to welcome our Emmanuel, God with us. Let your hope, peace, joy, and love be the light that guide us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 126

*When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*

(Luke 1:68-79 NRSV\*)

We read the words of Psalm 126 and hear of God’s joy. In this season of Advent, do you find the joy that comes with Christ’s presence? Do you look for opportunities to celebrate God’s love? How do you express and share the joy that comes with Christmas? How do you try to share your joy with others? How can we come together in love to celebrate God with us? How can we come together to share the light?

**Prayer:** In this season of preparation, we praise your constant presence in our lives, O Lord. Help us to celebrate the joy that you stir in our hearts with your love. Help us to recognize our home with you and may we treat each other as family at your table. May we find hope as we follow our Risen Savior, born into this world to make us free. We raise up our prayers to you this day that you may comfort, guide, and lead us into the light of your love. 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 for today comes from Zephaniah chapter 3 verses 14 through 20.

*Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The 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. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The 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 as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I 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. At 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. (Zephaniah 3:14-20 NRSV\*)*

Our next reading for today comes from Philippians chapter 4 verses 4 through 7.

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

Our last reading for today comes from Luke chapter 3 verses 7 through 18.

*John 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? Bear 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. Even 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." And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers 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." As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John 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. His 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." So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. (Luke 3:7-18 NRSV\*)*

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

This Sunday of Advent we celebrate joy, the joy of home. I was reminded once again of another Christmas movie. This one I think, if I had to pick a favorite, would be my favorite. If

you've never seen *The Bishop's Wife*, it is a story about joy and how we can miss out on it. And at its heart, it's about rediscovering the joy of the things around us and the joy that God gives us. I saw that, in our readings for today in Philippians, we are told to "rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say rejoice." That God will give us peace and understanding. That we don't have to worry about anything because the Lord is with us. The Lord is near. That we once again celebrate our Emmanuel, God with us. We hear it in the words of Zephaniah, that we should sing aloud and rejoice. That we shouldn't fear because God is in our midst. That God will rejoice over us with gladness. Bring an end to oppression, save the lame, gather the outcast, change their shame into praise, and that God will bring us home into that joy. Our Gospel reading gives us something a little different. There we have John the Baptist. We might say "where is the joy that John is giving?" Because John seems kind of upset at everybody, calling the people who came to him a brood of vipers. You are kind of killing the Christmas spirit here, John. But that's just the surface of John's message. Because John does give good news and give it plenty. Because John gives us a way to find that joy. The people say "if this is so bad, what can we do, John? What can we do?" The answer? Bear good fruit. Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Not that you're going to earn your place but that you'll live a life showing that you've been reconciled to God. That Christ is coming, and Christ will show you the way to joy. But they want to know "how do we get there?" How do we find this joy? How do we find the joy that Zephaniah speaks of how do we find the joy that Paul speaks about? How do we find it? In generosity, in kindness, in honesty, and in love. That's the answer that he gives. What should we do? If you have two coats, share with whoever has none. Whoever has food, share it with those who don't. To the tax collectors, take no more than you should and do your jobs well, and do them honestly. To the soldiers, don't threaten anyone, don't make false accusations, and be satisfied with what you have. Be honest and good. Show that your life is changed. John proclaimed the good news, not that everyone was lost, but that all could be found and that that joy could be theirs. Because that's the good news. The joy is for you.

I think that's why I was reminded of *The Bishop's Wife*. Because in it we find people who aren't happy. Lots of people who are worried about all sorts of things and that worry itself distracts them from the joy that they have. The worry of building a new church. The worry of one's marriage not being what they want it to be. The worry of not living up to expectations. The worry of not getting things their way. The worry of wanting people to give respect. And so, an angel comes to them. He comes and shows them there is joy; they just have to accept the joy. They have to make the opportunities. And that there they can find happiness, satisfaction, completion. The message is that the joy is there. You just have to stop ignoring it. So, it made me think about the joy that Christ gives. The joy that we celebrate on Christmas. That God chose to be with us so that we could experience that love and that hope. That it could live within us. Not just one day but every day. That it would follow us all of our days and that it was something that we could share. That sharing in that joy is sharing in Christ. That we share in love, in mercy, in generosity, in grace, and in hope so that others may know the joy that we

find. Because who doesn't love a joyful home? And who provides a more joyful home than our Savior?

The good news is good because we often lose sight of it. And it's discovering it again that awakens the joy in our hearts. It's the reason that Christmas reminds us of that joy because it reminds us of God's love. It reminds us of why we always have hope. Because God's saw fit to give us hope everlasting. Because God wanted us to know the joy he has in us. And so, it gives us call us to celebrate. To celebrate all that we have and all that we are. That we may celebrate that as long as Christ is within us that we will always have a reason to sing praises. That we will always have a reason to be joyful. That we will always have the love that we need to be generous. The love that we need to be able to celebrate, even in the face of adversity. The joy of knowing that we have a happy home. But it's up to us to claim that joy. It is up to us to experience it by opening ourselves up to that joy. Because we can't experience it if we are too busy trying to make sure that everything is just right for the time that that joy will come, because that joy is now. That joy is always. That joy is everywhere. We just have to stop and see it.

The joy is with me now, that I am here with you, my friends. That we come together in love to proclaim our joy. To strengthen each other and build each other up in that joy. So that when we go forth from this place that we share that joy. That we don't hesitantly wait, planning and prodding, poking around to figure out where the joy might be next. But we go out experiencing that joy and giving that joy. By sharing in peace. By sharing in love. Sharing it in all that we have so that others may not fear being in need of anything. Because Christ is with us, to let us find joy at all times. Especially when things get tough. Because too often we focus so much on the negative when things aren't going how we expected that we don't see the unexpected joy that's there right in front of us. That things get hard and so we start figuring out ways that we can make everything right again so that we can finally find that joy. And we get so busy fixing things that we miss the joy that's with us. I'm once again reminded of The Bishop's Wife. The Bishop is so worked up with making sure everything is going to plan that nothing is going right. We get so caught up in the things that we think are supposed to matter that we miss the things that truly do matter. We can't see each other for all of the things that need done. So busy preparing for joy that we don't experience it. So busy looking for joy that we step over it, trying to find it.

So, I say wake up! Rejoice! Again, I say rejoice! And again, I say rejoice in today. Rejoice in the now, because the good news is Christ is with you today. Christ is here, now. Christ's love is with us this very moment. Christ's joy is always and everywhere. So go out and sing Christmas carols. Put a smile on the face of others. Greet a stranger with a friendly greeting, with a warm hello. Share the good news to all that you see, that all my share in the blessing. That all may have hope. That all may have peace. That all may have joy. That we have a reason to be happy. No matter what. No matter where. No matter when. Because wherever we go, Christ is there. And wherever Christ is, we may find joy. Just make sure that you take the time

to see it, the time to give thanks for it, and the time to experience it. And don't forget to make sure that you take the time to share it. Because sharing in that hope is a joy all unto itself, giving birth again to more joy. And what better gift can we give, what better love can we share than the good news that Christ's joy is for us all. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** O Lord, the God who saw fit to walk with us, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions. We know that we fall short, both in what we do and what we fail to do. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead. Help us to proclaim the Good News and to live it. Help us in our weakness and forgive us. May we remember your love and redemption are forever with us, born to call us home. 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:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Our Current Series – Come Home for Christmas**

Our Advent/Christmas series is *Come Home for Christmas*. Advent is an invitation to celebrate Christ coming into the world, a reminder that God is with us. We celebrate the longing for God's kin-dom, the true home in God we hope for. The invitation for all is this: Come home for Christmas.

November 28th – *Time to Go Home* – Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thess. 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

December 5th – *The Fear of Home* – Malachi 3:1-4; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

December 12th – *The Joy of Home* – Zephaniah 3:14-20; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

December 19th – *The Blessing of Home* – Micah 5:2-5a; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45

December 24th – *Welcome Home* – Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

December 26th – *Lost at Home* – 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

January 2nd – *The Light of Home* – Jeremiah 31:7-14; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:-18

**Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Jodie Bunch	Gene Laymon	Tom Finley	Jim Nichols
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	

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