December 11, 2022 ~ 3rd Sunday of Advent ~ JOY!

I speak to you in the name of the God of JOY. Amen.

Joy! The secular dictionary definition of joy is great pleasure or great happiness. The biblical definition of joy is quite different and it is the biblical definition that I will be focusing on this morning.

You will notice that I am in the pink. Today in the Christian calendar is Gaudete Sunday, the 3rd Sunday of Advent, and Gaudete is the Latin word for REJOICE.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,” (Isaiah 61:10). St. Paul tells us to “rejoice always” (1 Thessalonians 5:16) and Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, instructs us to “rejoice and be glad.” (Matthew 5:12).

Mary’s Song of Praise, which was our canticle for this morning, is filled with JOY in the midst of her pregnancy, and she sings these words: “My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.” (Luke 1:47). We call her song the Magnificat and it is often sung or said in evening prayers.

I don’t know about you but there are many times this year when I haven’t felt like rejoicing. I find it hard to follow Jesus’ command to rejoice and Paul’s to rejoice always. There have been many situations this year of people dying, of people getting sick, of the war in Ukraine, climate change, a possible recession and rising food costs and interest rates. So is this truly the most wonderful time of the year for you?

CS Lewis wrote a book called “Surprised by JOY” in which he wrote about his conversion to Christianity and his accidental discovery of joy. Joy is not an emotion but a state of being. If you receive a jolt of joy, embrace it and if you are grieving, don’t feel guilty about this state of being in your heart. It is God’s gift to you to get you through your day.

In the early 1800’s, the British romantic poet William Wordsworth wrote a poem called *Surprised by Joy* and in the poem he expresses the sentiment that he feels very badly that he has experienced a moment of joy even while he is grieving the death of his daughter. Here are the first 3 lines of the poem.

*Surprised by joy—impatient as the Wind I turned to share the transport—Oh! with whom But Thee, long buried in the silent Tomb,*

The poem ends with him acknowledging his pain of loss.

I hope that Wordsworth came to the epiphany that it is all right to experience joy and to be surprised by joy in the midst of intense personal sorrow and loss.

Scripture tells us that we must rejoice and rejoice always and let our whole beings exult in our God. We are in the 3rd week of Advent when our focus is on joy, So how do we do this?

First, as Christians, we need to understand that the dictionary definition of joy does not hold true. Joy is not happiness. We are often not happy and we can’t expect that being a Christian, being a disciple of Jesus will always fill us with happiness.

Henri Nouwen said this, ”In the life of a God-centred person, sorrow and joy can exist together.’

Again, how do we do this?

We focus on the reality that we are God’s beloved. We focus on the truth that God promises to always be with us. We wake up in the morning and pray for joy, and intentionally select joy to carry us through the day.

We refuse to let our troubles win. We refuse to let the devastating headlines win. We refuse to let go of God’s holy and joyful light.

Hope, peace, joy, and love. Amazing gifts from God that will carry us through.

How do we do this? We pray without ceasing. We know that God is with us and that through prayer we will embrace joy.

Here is a story about **a Quiet and Holy People with a Great Secret**

As a third-century man was anticipating death, he penned these last words to a friend: “It’s a bad world, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people are the Christians–and I am one of them.”

I think this is the key to our Christian life, The secret of life. The secret of living well and living fully. We find JOY through Jesus. No wonder the church embraces the colour pink on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, the Sunday of rejoicing, the Sunday of JOY as we draw closer to Christmas.

I will close with a compelling Bible verse:

“The joy of the Lord is our strength,” (Nehemiah 8:10)

Let us always rejoice in the Lord. Amen.