

“THE ADVENT OF JOY.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

December 14, 2014, 10:30AM

Scripture Text: Psalm 16:11; Revelation 21:1-4

Introduction.

This morning on the third Sunday of Advent I bring you good news of a great joy. Joy. What a great word, what a great quality. There is nothing quite like it. How many here would like to have more of it? All of us I bet.

Goldie Hawn said she would. She told an interviewer one time, “I have other lofty goals, like seeking out what the meaning of joy is. And travelling the world and speaking to people from scientists, to Zulu tribes people, to aborigines to find out what joy is to them and how we can learn to access it” (<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/09/23/1032734111652.html>).

That’s a great goal, but I fear she is on the wrong track. I might be able to save her a bunch of time and money. I would start with Psalm 16:11. This is a verse that goes straight for the jugular. This is one of those cut to the chase verses in the Bible. No beating around the bush.

Psalm 16:11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

This verse declares some of the most profound truth in all of Scripture with power and beauty and hope. It speaks of things we value most supremely, life, joy and the presence of God.

Let’s unpack the characteristics of joy mentioned in this one text. There are at least four.

First, the source of true joy is God.

You will recall two weeks ago I spoke about conventional hope, that uncertain kind of hope that hopes something will happen or won’t happen. Last week I spoke about conventional peace that is found in the absence of fighting or chaos or noise. Like hope and peace, there is a conventional, predictable kind of joy, often we call it happiness.

Happiness is predictable. It shows up at all the places you would expect it to. Birthday parties, weddings, great vacations, phone calls from friends, a raise or a big bonus check, a great round of golf, finding something you have always wanted on sale, milk prices going up, kids coming home for Christmas.

I don’t know if Charles Schultz started it or not but remember those “happiness is ...” sayings years ago. Happiness is a warm blanket. Happiness is a warm puppy. Happiness is not having

to set your alarm, stomping on bubble wrap. Happiness is Friday, snow days from school, and chocolate. Happiness is toes in a sandy beach, a pile of leaves to jump in, and cozy fire to sit by. A cup of coffee in the morning and a soft pillow at night.

Like I said happiness is predictable and fleeting. If we want true and lasting hope and peace and joy we will have to find the true and lasting source.

God's gifts of life, health, wealth, prosperity, relationships and things are good, but they are not meant to satisfy us or be the source of our joy. If they were that would be idolatry. God is the only possible true, lasting source of our joy.

Do you know why God is the source of all joy? Because God is the happiest, most joyful being in all the universe. In the Parable of the Talents Jesus says to the servants who doubled the talents, "Enter into the joy of your master." The Gospel of Jesus Christ is an invitation to enter into the joy of the supremely happy and joyful God.

God takes great delight in being God. He has joy in Himself, in all His perfections, in His own glory and in all of His creation, in all the works of His hands. Everything God does, He does out of sheer delight and according to His good pleasure.

A story is told of three monks making an annual trip to visit a wise, holy man. Two of them asked many questions and shared thoughts and dreams, but the third companion remained silent and spoke not a word. After many visits the Teacher spoke to the silent monk. "Though you come here often, you ask me no questions." Smiling, the monk replied, "It is enough just to be with you, Teacher." *Ultimately joy means being in the presence of God.* (Adapted from: Wm. R. White, *Stories For The Journey*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 66).

Our God is the God of joy, He is the source of joy and in His presence is joy.

Second, the joy of God is full, it's abundant, it's without measure in quantity or in quality. God is the ever-flowing and over-flowing fountain of joy. His joy is inexhaustible. God has a vast storehouse full of joy. Whenever we think about God and any quality of His or gift of His we should think adjectives like rich, generous, lavish, extravagant, over-the-top, even excessive. God is never miserly or meager, and when it comes to joy He gives a fullness.

Third, the joy of God satisfies like no other joy or happiness. God created us for Him, to find our hope and peace and joy and rest in Him. God didn't create us to find ultimate satisfaction in this life apart from Him. His joy is the only joy that satisfies the longing of every human heart.

Picture in your mind a particularly joyful moment in your life. Maybe as you stood at the altar and watched your bride walk toward you, or as you walked toward your groom. Maybe the birth of your first child. Maybe sitting on some distant ocean shore drinking in the vastness of the ocean or standing at Artist Point overwhelmed by the beauty and grandeur. Maybe at a

concert where an exceptionally great symphony was played with incredible grace and skill. Maybe it was your conversion, when your heart surrendered to the prompting grace of God and the Holy Spirit came in. Maybe it was just the words, "I love you." Picture the happiest day of your life.

When every fiber of your being is filled with exuberant delight, that's a taste of being in the presence of God. The presence of God is better than the happiest day of your life.

Psalm 145:16, 19 You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing... 19 He fulfills the desire of those who fear him.

Fourth, the joy of the Lord is eternal. God who is the source of joy, God who has the fullness of joy, God who's joy is the only all satisfying pleasure, He is infinite and His joy is infinite. He already has plans for all eternity to lavish us with fuller and richer and deeper expressions of joy and pleasure.

How is this possible you think? We are finite and even when we get to heaven we will be finite. Yes, we will live forever, for infinity, but we won't be like God. We won't be able to comprehend Him fully. We will never wake up one day in heaven finally having reached the end of all there is to know about God or experience from God.

Our joy will increase forever and ever with infinite duration and greater depth and greater height. An infinite God is the source of infinite joy, and He will delight in glorifying Himself by showing and giving His joy to us.

The path of life that promises the most fulfilling, satisfying, lasting joy and pleasure is the path that leads into the presence of God (not Zulus or aborigines).

To put it in a nutshell, the world divides into two groups, those who are separated from God's presence by their sin and without joy, and those who have been reconciled to God and have joy. Lack of joy is a consequence of our separation from God. Fullness of joy is a consequence of our reconciliation with God and in continuing to trust in Him.

Two great pictures of joy in Scripture are stories of reconciliation.

What a picture of great joy it is when old Jacob is brought to Egypt to see his son Joseph whom he thought was dead. Joseph went out in his chariot to meet his father and fell on his neck and wept a good while (Genesis 46:29).

In the NT the father of the prodigal thought his son was dead, while his son was still a good ways off, ran to him and embraced him and celebrated that he was still alive.

Oh the joy when a heart comes home, when a father and a son, when a parent and a child are reunited. Oh the joy when a rebellious sinner comes home to his heavenly Father. There is joy in heaven and joy on earth. In the presence of the Father there is great joy for His children.

Joy corresponds to value. The greater the perceived value, the greater the joy. Jacob was joyful when his son's brought back grain from Egypt, but not nearly as joyful as when they brought him to see Joseph. The woman who found the one lost coin was joyful, but not nearly as much as the man who received back his lost son.

Advent is about a greater joy coming, a joy of far greater value than every earthly joy. Advent is about the joy of God being present with us, in us.

When we perceive the value of what God has done for us in the indescribable gift of His Son; when we see in Jesus a treasure of hope and joy; *then* we will have a pearl of great price type response. We gladly and willingly abandon every fleeting joy and with exuberant abandon run to Him. And that is the joy that *should* mark us as Christians and as a Christian church.

There is that hard word, "should." "Pastor, you tell me I should have joy, but I don't. How am I supposed to do that, especially when some days it is all I can do just to survive, let alone be joyful." Between that cup of coffee in the morning and a soft pillow at night there can be a lot of things that steal our joy.

Can there be joy in hardship and heartache?

Some of us here are in the midst of some pretty daunting challenges or unrelenting pressures. Concerns at work, on the farm, in relationships, concerns over health or future. We think if only this would change or stop or get better life would be better and we could be happy.

Is Paul crazy when he says in II Corinthians 6:10 he is "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; having nothing, yet possessing everything."

Can there be joy in hardship and heartache? The answer is yes for at least three reasons.

First because our joy is in the God who can and does cause all things to work for His glory and for good for those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28; see Ephesians 1:11). We have joy knowing that everything in our lives has a redemptive purpose.

Testimony of the daughter of a friend of ours who died suddenly yesterday: "Overwhelmed with the love and support of friends and family tonight. The world lost a beautiful man today, my dad. Although I am at a loss for words and explanation of it all, I know one thing: God is good. All the time. He is consistent and never changing, and with that I will be able to find peace. It will take time, but thanks to the amount of support and prayer it will be possible. My heart is broken tonight, I love you so much dad. Your worries and troubles of this world are over and I know you're at peace alongside our Heavenly Father. I love you."

Romans 8:18 The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Our joy in the midst of trials is knowing that joy awaits us at the end of our trials and knowing that the joy of the Lord is our strength for the present enduring of them.

Secondly, not only do we have joy in affliction because we have a sure and certain hope in the redemptive purposes of God, but we have learned something about the paradoxical nature of joy. Joy is a truly remarkable emotion. It not only endures, but actually flourishes in the midst of affliction.

Joy can show up in the most unexpected places, even some places where you would never expect to find it, in hospital rooms, at funerals, in prison cells, on dark nights.

Romans 5:3-5 We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

James 1:2-4, 12 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Painful lessons are the most valuable, helpful, long-lasting and in the end, the most fruitful.

But of this you can finally be sure, **joy is our inheritance** after this brief life is over.

We have the example of Jesus “the founder and perfecter of our faith, **who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross**, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2, ESV).

John 16:22 You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

No one can steal my joy from me, unless I let them. And that’s one of the greatest challenges of this earthly journey. I have to constantly fight letting anyone or anything steal my joy. I have to keep preaching the Gospel to myself, I have to keep telling myself the truth about where my joy comes from and how secure it is.

Jesus came and suffered and died for our joy and has ascended to heaven where He is now preparing joy for us and us for joy. In the words of G.K. Chesterton, “The serious business of heaven is joy.” There is no joy like the joy of heaven.

Revelation 21:1, 3-4 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, ... 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "**Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.** 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

David said it perfectly in Psalm 16:11, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

We were created for this and in heaven we will finally realize the fulfillment of our call and purpose. It is summed up in Rev. 22:4 as “we shall see His face.” When we see Him face to face, we will want for nothing else. In seeing His face we will know the fulfillment of everything we desire, of all the longings we have ever had for hope, peace, joy and love.

Psalm 27:4 One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

In the Bible, joy was celebrated with singing, dancing, shouting, clapping of hands and feasting. When you feast these next two weeks, feast with the joy of the Lord. May the inexpressible joy of the Lord be yours and mine this season and always.

Prayer: Father of all joy, open our eyes that we would see you more clearly and seek your presence more earnestly and seek our joy in you and in you alone. Father, drive away from our hearts the fruitless joys and trivial pleasures that tempt us every day. Open our eyes to see that in your presence is the fullness of joy inexpressible.