

Pastor Roy's Sermon from Dec. 14, 2014 (3rd Sunday of Advent)

Children: What makes you glad?

Today we lit the pink candle of the advent wreath, the joy candle. The candle which calls us to remember our gladness, to even rejoice! To rejoice is to remember goodness, to count the ways that grace and wonder fill our lives and all of creation. We never run out of points of gratitude. We can always be grateful, whether we feel happiness or grief. If we are grateful, we have joy. We are glad.

There is beauty in the sky, in the landscape, in the creatures and plants around us. We have good neighbors and the chance to share mercy. We have the gift of laughter and smiles, inspiring stories, a season of hope and peace even though there is always trouble and uncertainty. Our faith in God's goodness and mercy are a foundation for hope in trouble and hardship. Joy is at home with goodness and mercy even in turmoil.

This goodness is not just based on our limited, personal experience, but on all of the ways God's love and peace are present in our world. We can rejoice with our sisters and brothers here in this place, around the world, and throughout time. God's grace is not limited and our gratitude and joy can be the same. Furthermore, if we look out and feel gratitude, we will see and feel the goodness. If we look out and feel embittered, we will be overwhelmed by the trouble, pain, and suffering and it will stay and roost in our souls. Some naturally see the negative, trouble, they must work hard to take notice of the good—for everyone this is a discipline which will bring many great rewards.

Now mind you, I'm not saying we should ignore the pain and trouble, we need to take it seriously and work compassionately against it. However, (?) is not the goodness much greater and more foundational than the trouble? Hope comes from the divine essence of life which fills creation. The scope of evil is limited, even though it is quite overwhelming for some. These are the ones who most need our love, our mercy, our hope. We need to hear their stories and walk alongside them.

Hope trumps despair, without exception. The power of God is ceaselessly, mercifully, working goodness and peace in the fabric of creation. Sometimes we see it and feel it, sometimes we do not. Either way, I believe it is there. At times it takes discipline to see. With patient and impatient waiting, we have hope. We have joy.

Isaiah proclaims joy and gladness as the comforting news of God's justice given to the oppressed, brokenhearted, captives, and prisoners. The very least receive news of hope and break forth in joy.

John the Baptist is asked, are you the one? "No, I am pointing to the One." I am not the source of joy, I proclaim this joy, this one who is coming into the world to be and bring peace and hope.

Embedded in his confession is a deep awareness that it was not about him. He served to point to the source of hope. To this one who comes bringing the message of the compassion and welcome of God. John is glad to point to the Son of God. It's not about him. He finds joy in being an accessory to the mercy of God. There is complete freedom in letting go of the need to be the center of even his own world, or his Lord's. He is unworthy to loosen his sandal strap. Joy comes from letting go.

Paul finds freedom in letting go of his own convenience, comfort, and ego. He gives thanks in the midst of "whatever." He prays and rejoices because that is what is possible when we let go of the need to be at the center of our world. That is where perfect freedom is found. We simply need eyes of gratitude, observing all the wonders of God's compassionate mercy at work all around.

Joy is the freedom of releasing our own self-centeredness, our own ego which drives our compulsions, this vacuum is filled with joy. Joy is found in releasing ourselves to God, who can be trusted beyond our ability to understand. Here is our advent spring of joy. We are grateful, we have joy.