

Pastor Roy's Sermon from December 11, 2016 (3rd Sunday of Advent)

Isaiah proclaims the joy of following Yahweh. Isaiah knew joy. Now, there were many things in Isaiah's day that were deeply troubling. It was a time of political turmoil. There were invading nations from the north, from the south--would Judah even survive? Would faith survive? And even if the trouble did go away, there never seemed to be enough to go around. So much need among the people. And there was great injustice and inequity in Israel too. And yet the miserable were joyous!

Joy in upheaval? Joy in exile? Joy returning home to uncertainty and misery and hunger? The early Christians were terribly persecuted—they had no rights, and yet they found joy. What is this joy?

I'm pretty sure these saints who confess joy in tough times were not smiling every moment, every day, but they had joy—a peace beyond thinking—beyond understanding.

It can't be based on circumstances, what's going on around us. Joy and fear have nothing in common. They dwell in separate spaces. Could joy flow from a deep trust and rest in God's promises—even when nothing seems to be going according to what I want? Joy is based on faith!

Martin Luther was a hunted and wanted man for the last 25 years of his life. He still had joy. He was not afraid. He was not afraid of losing his religious or political freedom because his freedom came from within. No one could take away his freedom. He wrote Katie, his wife, just a week before he died of a fairly now treatable illness. He was not one bit concerned for his own life. He was more concerned that Katie was worried about him.

It makes sense that joy would flow from love and faith. We know joy in the midst of fear and anxiety. Joy is deep trust in all that is. Trust in God. Willingness to trust neighbor, sisters and brothers, and community. Joy is rest. Yes, it is a struggle.

Joy happens as we learn to loosen our grip on everything and everyone about whom we care. (2x) To love is to let go, even as we hold dear those we love. We support. We listen. But we release. To truly listen is laugh with those who laugh, be upset with those who are upset, weep with those who weep.

Take John the Baptist for example. He is very unsure. By faith he knows the kingdom of God is near. Is Jesus the one to bring the kingdom? He wants to know. Does John know the joy which Isaiah knew? Perhaps John is trying to substitute knowledge and certainty for faith. Joy evades John the Baptist until he rests in trust. I trust he knew joy. Perhaps when Jesus suggests his followers have something that John does not, he leaning in on joy and deep trust in God.

At our core we are people of joy. . .by faith. We can entrust ourselves to the reign of Christ's compassionate justice.

Mary! My soul **magnifies** the Lord, and my spirit **rejoices in God** my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the **lowliness** of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me **blessed**; for the **Mighty One** has done great things for me, and **holy** is his name. His **mercy** is for those who **fear** him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has **scattered the proud** in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the **powerful** from their thrones, and lifted up the **lowly**; he has filled the **hungry** with good things and sent the **rich** away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the **promise** he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendant forever.

Mary deeply trusted God rather than her circumstances. She trusted the holy hunch of faithfulness. In Luke's account of Mary's chat with the angel, it all seems pretty obvious, but faithfulness is rarely

obvious, and deep trust in God requires discipline and mindfulness and prayer, or we forget what is true and we fall prey to appearances. Mary chooses to trust deeply beyond human impulse and need.

Give this some thought, and if you want to know a greater sense of joy, spend more time seeking what it means that God is with us. You might have to listen more carefully to who God truly is and be willing to let go of some ideas about God that you desperately want God to be. Mary had to do that through the course of her life.

God with us for true joy. True Joy. True God. Not what we see in advertising all around us--using hope and distant memories to influence your spending. Seek the *true* joy. Seek the *true* God.

God with us for joy. Only you can decide how to live into the truth of joyous trust. Courage to all of us.

Amen.