

## “Seeing the World through God’s Eyes of Joy”

### Proverbs 15: 30

I need to tell everyone something before we get started with the sermon this morning. This third Sunday of Advent has always thrown me for a loop. It is just an odd Sunday. And this year, its oddness seems to be worse. We are on the third Sunday of Advent but just finished the second week of December. My brain just isn’t putting the two together. I keep thinking that we should be lighting the peace candle and that we still have weeks to go before Christmas Eve.

I don’t know if you were feeling the same way or not but I thought I just had to share where I am on my journey to Bethlehem, hoping that it wasn’t just me. Usually I am okay with this third Sunday of Advent throwing me for a loop but this year, it seems to be worse, yes, partly because of the timing, but also because it has always bugged me that we are light a pink candle on this day. It doesn’t make sense to me. I know traditionally, liturgically, it has always been a pink candle for the third Sunday in Advent but I’ll be honest, I always want to put the pink candle on the fourth Sunday which has the theme of love. That makes sense to me. That would be logical. Pink for love, but pink for joy? I never seem to be able to wrap

my mind around that one. Okay now, that is all of my chest, we'll get started with the sermon now because I realized something.

This week, as I continued to think about the oddness of this Sunday, it struck me once again that it is just as odd that we are talking about joy right now. Now, in the midst of all that is going on in our nation, now in the midst of all that is going on in our world right now, we are talking about joy right now. Crisis after crisis seems to be filling our news, let alone all the personal crisis that seems to be coming our way, and the best we've got, the best we can offer is to talk about joy right now.

Does anyone else find it, well, odd, that our theme for today is joy in spite of what all is going on around us? We are talking about joy while it seems like our world is falling apart. Don't you think that is a little, well...odd?

As I was wondering if we as people of faith had finally slipped into the grand state of denial, it hit me. We as people of faith are odd. We worship a crucified Savior. We believe that things like grace and love can and will bring healing and wholeness to all. We hold firm that we are called to love all God's children, not just the people we like, not just the people who think like us, we are called to love all of God's children as God has loved us. And if that isn't odd enough, we believe in God's peaceable kingdom where the lion will lay down with

the lamb. We believe that there is another way, a different way that is not based on power and might but on seeing everyone through the eyes of God.

I guess, when it really comes down to it, we as people of faith, as people of God are really odd, and I'll be honest, I am thankful for this oddness that sets us apart from this world. For one simple reason. Through our oddness, I am constantly reminded that God has the last word in this world and that word will be a word of love, a word of peace, a word of hope, and yes, a word of JOY!

Come to think about it, we need JOY right now. We need to rejoice right now. We need to celebrate right now. We need JOY in our lives and in our world right now. And not just any joy, not the joy that the stores promise will come after we buy certain items. Not the joy that we hope will come when we do a good deed for someone. We need Joy, true joy right now, the joy that is a gift from God. The true joy that reminds us that God's grace is transforming us into the people that God called us to be, that God created us to be. We need joy, true joy, that reminds us that God, and only God, can and will bring laughter out of our tears, joy out of our sorrows. We need joy, true joy, joy that constantly reminds us that even in the darkest night, God's light will never fade away.

We need joy right now, the joy that only by walking in faith we can experience, the joy that only comes from being in a real authentic relationship with

God, the joy that only comes from knowing that we are claimed and named as God's own beloved child.

We need that joy right now, more than ever. And it all starts with a twinkle in our eye. It all starts by seeing the world through God's eyes of joy right here, right now.

Sure, I'll admit that I picked this Scripture because it mentions the word "eye" and it ties in very nicely with our theme for Advent. But as I lived with this text this past week, I realized that it also captures the very essence of what it means to see the world through God's eyes of joy. It reminds us that we are called to live out and to share with all of God's creation the joy we experienced the moment we first encountered Christ in our lives.

Do you remember that moment? Was there a twinkle in your eye? Was there joy in your heart? Do the good news, the news that you were God's own, refresh your body and restore your soul?

Do you remember the joy?

You see, We Christians have a reputation for being very serious, for being a very non-fun loving group. People don't equate laughter and joy with church and faith. Usually people tend to think of Christianity or faith as more about what we are not supposed to do than living a life of joy.

But that perception is all wrong. And we as people of God have done nothing to help people change that perception. We criticize and we judge. We point fingers and we yell. We say who is in and who is out. But do we ever really talk about the joy that comes along with being named and claimed as one of God's own. Do we ever really talk about the joy that comes along with being in a real authentic relationship with God?

Faith, our faith, the faith that we are called to live out each and every day is about celebrating life. Faith, the faith that we are called to live out each and every day is about joy. It is about finding delight in God's creation that surrounds us. It is about celebrating the moments of grace and peace that fill our lives. It is about knowing that God loves us more than we could ever imagine. How in the world, if this was the type of faith that we really practiced as people of God, how in the world could we not keep from rejoicing and celebrating? How in the world, could anyone ever accuse us of being depressing? How in the world, if all we did was see the world through God's eyes of joy, how in the world, could people not want to be in a relationship with God?

That is what our story, the story that shapes us and forms us as the people of God is all about. It is about joy. It is about new life. It is about God calling the people to experience and celebrate the grace and love that God has so generously

offered to all of God's creation. Our story is about finding joy, our joy, in being named and claimed as one of God's own.

But we as people of faith certainly don't act like we are joyful people. Instead, we tend to talk more about being forced to go to church. Instead, we tend to talk more about all that we have to do to be in a relationship with God. Instead, we tend to talk more about our faith as an obligation rather than a gift of new life and joy.

If you take nothing else from this sermon, please hear this. As people of faith, as people of God, we are called to celebrate the many ways God surprises and delights us with possibilities. We are called to celebrate and experience God's gift of joy. We are called to celebrate and experience God's gift of new life that greets us each and every day.

Now please don't hear me say, that just because we are people of God, that life is going to always be sunshine and rainbows. Because that is not true. Life is not like that. We as people of God can and do experience the ups and downs of life just like anyone else.

But, but, we know...we know that our God, and only our God, can bring joy out of our sorrow, laughter out of our tears, good out of the evil that is in our world

today. We know that our God, and only our God will have the last word, and that word will be a word of joy.

We can say this confidently and we know this deep in our heart, because we know the joy that fills our lives as God's beloved children is not grounded in anything we do. It is not grounded in anything we say. Our joy is grounded in the framework of God's promise. Our joy is grounded in the framework of God's life-giving and life changing purpose for all of God's creation. Our joy is grounded in the framework of that first moment we experienced Christ in our lives.

We also know something else. We know that there is healing in this gift of joy. No it is not a quick band-aid or a denial of reality. Our healing comes to us through the joy of knowing God is there no matter what comes our way. We know that Our lives may not be what we expected or thought they would be when we were younger but we realize that through this gift of joy that only God can give, we know that our lives are and will continue to be okay. The joy we experience as people of faith reminds us constantly that God's light will never fade away or leave us alone. The joy we experience as being claimed and named by our God reminds us that there is always, always the possibility for new life.

Maybe it's time we start changing our tune of faith from serious and depressing to shouts and celebrations of joy. Because the thing we need to

remember and the thing this world always forgets is that God has never left or abandoned the people of God and God is not about to start now.

Our story, the story that shapes us and forms us, is filled with story after story of how God worked to save the people of God. Time and time again, God has filled the people of God's lives with joy and grace. Even in their darkest moments, God was there bringing joy and hope.

Think about it. One minute the people of God were crying out, buckling under the oppression of the Egyptians and the next minute, they are singing songs of celebration because God acted to save God's people. One minute the people of God were crying out in exile, despairing of ever seeing their homeland again and the next minute, they are celebrating because God was bringing them home.

Our story as the people of God is a story of joy. It is a story of new life. It is a story of impossible possibilities, all because God is constantly working to bring about God's Kingdom here on earth for all of God's people. Our joy as the people of God has a history. Our joy as the people of God is constantly nurtured by descriptions of how God acted again and again to save the people of God, nurtured by the descriptions of how God has worked to bring healing and wholeness, by descriptions of how God has worked again and again to bring new life to all of God's creation.

This is our story. It is a story of joy and celebration. It is a story of hope and possibilities.

The other thing we need to remember as we celebrate our story is that our joy as people of faith is an active joy. It is not just about having a party and celebrating. It is about inviting all to come and experience the same joy. It is a reminder that there is work to be done, needs to be met. Our joy is our way of bringing healing and wholeness to all of God's creation.

So yes, it may seem odd that we are talking about joy today. And yes, We understand that without God's promises and God's life-giving purposes for this world, it would seem odd to talk about joy in the midst of all the crisis. But we have God's promises. We know God's purpose of new life for God's creation. We have experienced the true joy that comes with being in a real authentic relationship with God.

So what is stopping us? Our job as people of faith is to go out and share the good news. Our calling as people of faith is to out and shout from the mountain tops, that God's light will never fade away no matter how dark the night may be. Our response to God's gift of grace and love is go out and share our joy with all of God's creation so that healing and wholeness can happen.

Our response to God's gift of grace and love is to always find delight in the many and variety ways God surprises us each and every day.

And we do this by starting to see the world through God's eyes of joy.

May we always celebrate God's gift of joy and the way it brings us back to life.

Amen.