

Moore Presbyterian Churches

December 12, 2021

Third Sunday of Advent

God calls us to worship

Hymn: #119 "Hope is a star"

Advent reading and candle lighting (Insert)

On the first Sunday of Advent,
we light the candle of Hope.
We consider the age in which we're living,
and we prepare ourselves to welcome Christ
not only at the cradle,
not only at the wedding feast of heaven and earth,
but in the daily, chaotic, messiness
that is life between the horizons.

On the second Sunday of Advent,
we light the candle of Peace.
We remember that as long as we are apart
from the One who created life itself,
there will be no peace.
We thank God for His offer of forgiveness
realized in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ.
We turn to Him in heart, mind, and body,
and rejoice in the peace that passes understanding.

Today, on this third Sunday of Advent,
we light the candle of Joy.
And we rejoice in the assurance,
that with the advent of the Messiah,
the Father is working all things
for the redemption and re-creation
of His Garden of Eden.

Song: "A Candle is Burning" (verse 3)

We offer our prayers

Prayer of Praise

Almighty God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
You are our strength and our song.
You gather those who have strayed from you
and welcome them back to your side.
You bring healing to those who are broken in body and spirit,
and draw close to those who walk alone.

Through your great love and mercy,
you transform us all into more than we ever thought we could be.
We will trust in you and not be afraid.
With joy, we sing of your glory
and proclaim your saving power to those near and far.
Receive our prayers and praise this day,
for you alone are worthy, God most holy.

Prayer of Confession (Unison):

**God of mercy:
you have called us to be thankful
for your good gifts to us,
but too often we have taken them for granted
as if we deserved them.**

**You have called us to be hopeful
through the gospel of Jesus Christ,
but too often despair has come upon us,
and the cares of the world have weighed us down.**

**You have called us to be joyful
in the wonder of your presence among us,
but too often we become mired in the mundane
and lose the gift of reverence.**

**By your saving power, O God,
enable us to celebrate your love for us
with joy and thanksgiving.**

Assurance of Pardon

The scriptures say, “Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” The forgiveness we seek is ours through the grace of Jesus Christ. May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, be with you.

Hymn: #110 “Come, thou long-expected Jesus”

We offer our lives and resources

Offering plates are positioned as you enter and leave the sanctuary. If you'd prefer to use e-transfers, please speak with Rev. Ian, Judy Armstrong (St. Andrew's), or Howard McKellar)

God speaks to us through his Word

READ: Zephaniah 3:14-20
 Isaiah 12:2-6
 Philippians 4:4-7
 Luke 3:7-18

Joy

1. It's always a little jarring to read John the Baptist on the third Sunday of Advent, the Sunday designated as "Joy."

 We light the pink candle to represent *joy*. We read Paul's encouraging words to "Rejoice in the Lord always!" We read of Isaiah's promise that you will draw water from the wells of salvation with *joy*. We read the prophet Zephaniah's words to "Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!"

 And then we get to John the Baptist.

 His preaching style definitely has an aggressive edge!

 He addressed his congregation as a "brood of vipers" and then instilled fear of the "wrath to come" by warning them that the axe is already poised at the root of the trees!

 There is certainly a different tone to John's proclamation of good news than to that proclaimed by the angel to the group of shepherds:

Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.¹

 I wonder if John's aggression could be interpreted as an expression of urgency; albeit, perhaps a mishandled expression of urgency.

¹ Luke 2:10

2. Sometimes when we see someone do something that we know to be foolish or harmful, our desire for their safety creates in us a feeling of panic which often gets expressed violently.

We raise our voices; maybe even shout.

We call them “fools” – or worse!

We warn them of the horrendous catastrophes that will happen if they continue this behaviour: “If you don’t zip up your coat when you go outside, you’ll catch a cold that will turn into pneumonia coupled with hypothermia, you’ll end up in the hospital, and probably die!”

We might even lay hands on them to try and stop their actions.

Such reactions on our part are mishandled expressions of the urgency we feel to stop the people we care about from hurting themselves.

We know there’s a safer/healthier alternative, yet they continue their foolish ways! This creates in us a feeling of panic.

3. John the Baptist had received a word from God: that the alternative had become a reality: “The king of Israel, the Lord, your God is in your midst!”

He was to proclaim that the Lord had come; the Messiah was among them!

Thus, he was to encourage the people to prepare their hearts, minds, and bodies to receive the salvation of God which the Messiah had initiated.

I wonder if John’s urgency came from an understanding that the effect of the Messiah’s arrival on the hearts and minds of individual people is a sense of joy so profound that it transcends all our present sufferings. And the people’s refusal to accept Jesus as this Messiah was preventing them from experiencing this holy joy for themselves.

There is a book written by Joan Chittister called *The Liturgical Year*. In it she addresses the holy habit of marking time according to the seasons of the liturgical year.

In the section on the season of Advent, which begins the year, she wrote:

*Good news of great **joy**, we learn at the beginning of the liturgical year, is what searching for the baby is all about.²*

² *The Liturgical Year*, 72.

And again:

*...it is precisely the journey to **joy** that the liturgical year is all about.³*

Joy is the inclination of the heart and mind that rests in the assurance that the Lord God, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, is its salvation.

Joy is more than simply a fleeting emotion.

Happiness is an emotion that depends on circumstances.

Joy is the effect on our hearts and minds when we are assured that our heavenly Father will bring us home, will gather us to himself.

Joy is the product of living out of the knowledge that we are in the fellowship of our Creator.

Joy is the inclination of the heart and mind that rests in the assurance that the Lord God, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, is its salvation.

In his great priestly prayer recorded in John 17, as Jesus was preparing to return to the Father, he prayed: "... I speak these things in the world so that they may have *my joy* made complete in themselves." (John 17:13)

In John 15:11, Jesus spoke directly to his disciples: "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete."

The advent of the Messiah means that we can share Jesus' own joy in our daily living.

4. The liturgical season of Advent is designed to help us prepare to receive Christ and the joy he brings.

Perhaps we can now re-word John's sermon by saying that in Jesus – the unique man born in Bethlehem – the Lord God is in our midst; the one who created all that

³ Ibid.

exists, the one who removes disaster, saves the lame, gathers the outcast; the one who is our salvation, our strength, and might in in our midst in the mystery of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the life of Jesus means joy in our hearts and minds expressed in hopeful, peaceful, and loving living in Jesus' name.

And, if it doesn't, maybe, like the crowds who thought that John might be the Messiah – or even Abraham – maybe we're looking in the wrong place. Or searching in the wrong way!

The season of Advent reminds us that when our hearts are wearied by frivolous distractions or drunkenness or simply the worries of this life, as we read two weeks ago, then it's time to stop and re-turn to the Lord as we read last week. To repent.

The Apostle Paul gives us a strategy for such repentance that, by God's grace, produces Christ's joy in us:

Prayer and Supplication with Thanksgiving.

In *prayer* we re-orient our way of thinking to that of Christ's.

Supplications (ask on other's behalf) trust that God is real, that the Messiah is with us by the Spirit, that he is good, and that he is able to effect good change in our lives and the lives of others.

Thanksgiving acknowledges His present mercy and grace.

By the mystery of the Holy Spirit, prayer and supplication with thanksgiving re-orient our hearts and minds away from our anxieties and fears and toward the Lord in fellowship with whom is hope, peace, and joy.

For the good of our souls, the health of the nations, and the glory of God.

Amen.

Choir anthem (St. Andrew's): "The Joyous News" ~ Joe E. Park

We respond with prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

O God, our Strength and Salvation,
we come before you with joy and thanksgiving
as the beauty of this season unfolds with starry nights,

with faces that smile and generosity that grows.
With the kindness of your Spirit,
awaken opportunities for understanding to emerge among those who have
differed,
and refresh our community and congregation with joyful anticipation
that your gift to us in Christ can change everything.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Tender God,
We delight in the joy you bring into our lives and neighbourhoods
through our life together in Christ, and through the love of family and friends.
These gifts have sustained us through stressful times
and we thank you.
We pray for those who are finding it hard to be joyful this year,
remembering those facing illness in spirit, mind, or body,
and those waiting for diagnosis or treatment, as anxiety grows.
(Keep a brief time of silence)

We pray for those who are lonely or in mourning,
and all who have been touched by tragedy and violence.
(Keep a brief time of silence)

We pray for those searching for work, struggling with rising costs,
worried deeply about their security.
(Keep a brief time of silence)

And we pray for those working to bring justice to the discouraged and defeated,
and those doing their best to care for the earth you love, despite the challenges.
(Keep a brief time of silence)

Use us to bring to joy to others through our friendship, generosity and
understanding.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We offer our prayers in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our hope, our peace,
and our joy, who taught us to pray these words together:

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with His blessing

Hymn: #145 "In the bleak mid-winter"
Blessing

Choral Amen