

“Joy to the World”

Isaiah 12:2-6

Chelsea Cornelius | Sermon for Sunday, December 12, 2021

Would you join me in a brief prayer? *God of this Advent season, we call on your spirit to guide our time together this day and in this season. May it be so that each and every heart prepare room for all that is to come. Amen.*

Our scripture reading this morning comes from Isaiah – a major prophet in the Hebrew Bible, an honest voice and a hopeful voice for those waiting in the dark. The original readers and listeners to this prophet were in exile—forced out of their homes, their places of worship, their communities; out of rhythm with their routines and rituals; traumatized, afraid, and waiting, waiting, waiting for something to change. And in the midst of it, the prophet has this reminder:

Isaiah 12: 2-6:

²Surely God is my salvation;

I will trust, and will not be afraid,
for the Lord God is my strength and my might;
[God] has become my salvation.

³With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

⁴And you will say in that day:

Give thanks to the Lord,
call on [God's] name;
make known [God's] deeds among the nations;
proclaim that [God's] name is exalted.

⁵Sing praises to the Lord, for [God] has done gloriously;
let this be known in all the earth.

⁶Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Thanks be to God for the words of scripture.

And in the unknown of exile, the prophet's task here is to revitalize and remind this community of what hope, life, redemption could look like when for so long they have been out of place and in the dark. In the setting of all that has gone wrong and every horror and heartbreak, he reminds them, implores them, to give thanks and call on God's name, to shout aloud and sing for joy because something is happening, your waiting has not been in vain, the holy one is in your midst. For anyone who feels they have lost their way, or have been forced to tread on unsteady ground, a new road is being prepared for you. For us.

Each Sunday in Advent we light the Advent candles and celebrate HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE leading to Christmas, and today is Joy Sunday. It's the week we light the pink candle—a distinctive one in the set that even further reminds us how central joy is to our practice of faith and our celebration of this season. And so our scripture today reminds us: Practice joy, draw from that well of thanksgiving and celebration and singing our hearts out for what is good and true and beautiful and *on its way*. Light that cute pink candle. *Shout aloud and sing for joy*.

But maybe we haven't felt much like singing lately. Or at least, maybe we're feeling a lot less "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" and a lot more "Oh Come, Oh Come Emmanuel." Advent is a season of waiting and waiting is not easy. We know this, not just as we wait in Advent but because we are all waiting for something all the time. We are all waiting for something...

To be less anxious.
To feel less lonely.
To feel better at work.
To go back to work.
To mend fractured relationships.
To find love.
To stop losing things.
To stop losing the people we love.
For the grief to lighten just a little bit.
For the snow to come.

For the snow to stop coming.
For your body to look like it used to.
For an ounce more self-compassion.
To go without bad news for just a little while.
To hear that it wasn't as bad as we thought.
To feel like things will be okay.
To know the kids will be alright.
For the arc to bend towards justice.
For peace on earth.
For joy to the world.

We are waiting. We are all waiting. And sometimes it feels like we are waiting in the dark—no end in sight. But the good news is that Advent—and those glimmering candles—remind us to make our waiting a practice of faith. Rather than a practice of doubt or despair (of ‘nothing will change or ever get better’), waiting can be a practice of faith that maybe, just maybe, it won't all go wrong after all.

Advent is not about asking, “Will this ever end?” or “Are we there yet?” But instead, it's about asking:

Can we find faith in the unknown?
Can we find light in the darkness?
Can we find joy in the waiting?

At the UW Children's Hospital where I work as the Pediatric Chaplain, one of the greatest sources of whole-hearted joy that I have witnessed this winter is the addition of one of our newest staff members: She is a 3-year-old Golden Retriever named Kiko. She's the children's hospital's first facility dog, a full-time member of the team that walks the halls and crawls onto the hospital beds to offer comfort, connection, and joy to our pediatric patients and their families.

And we had a patient recently, a young boy admitted after a pretty severe head injury. And while prior to his injury he loved to sing and dance, play and socialize, in his recovery he was really struggling to speak clearly and confidently, struggling to get through each day. He worked with our speech and therapy teams every day, slowly

re-learning how to speak, but he was hesitant, and struggled to let words out. His team, his family all waiting, waiting for what would happen, how he would ever find his voice again.

But there was one day, when he got a visitor—the dog Kiko. Beaming with excitement the boy nodded yes to having his special visitor and Kiko walked in, sidled up next to him, and the team introduced Kiko to the young boy. And then the boy who struggled to speak, leaned down and quietly but joyfully let out his first words: “Hi Kiko.”

We are all waiting in the dark, and the dark can be scary, or lonely, or tiring. But the good news is that there are glimmers of light, moments of joy that remind us that our sadness and our struggles are not the final word. And so we wait.

Amen.