

## The Depth of Joy

December 13, 2020, Third Sunday of Advent

Gospel of John 1:6-8, 19-28

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We are more than bi-products of an evolving universe. We are loved and cared for by our Creator – created in image and likeness, to go on with a creativity that contributes to all creation.

Our creativity is really God's creativity through us. We get into trouble when we see our own inadequacy as disconnecting us from God - - thereby losing the sense that we belong to God - - usually resulting in depression, mistrust, and fearful responses and feeling that we have nothing to offer.

We also get into trouble when we lose sight of our need for God and get lost in our own infantile grandiosity by over identifying with God and that we are in control. When we find ourselves starting to think we have all the answers, God has a way of reminding us we don't.

It is very easy to fall into a mode of living in a way that forgets our absolute need for God's help, especially when we are young, productive, and things are going well. But as we mature, we hopefully realize more and more that we need help from above because we hopefully begin to see our own inadequacies all too well.

In our Gospel, John the Baptist is questioned as to whether or not he is the one they are all expecting - - the light, the Messiah. In a sense, all of Israel recognizes the inadequacy of the world and collectively are looking for the long awaited Messiah, the answer to their deepest longings. This awaiting is deeply engrained in their traditions, their recorded history, religion and culture. It is a reflection of the basic human desire for fulfillment. But the people have only human images and speculations to go by. And for all they know, this rural simple, rustic voice from the desert who baptizes, is he.

Whoever the Messiah is they expect him to bring them the very thing promised in our first reading from Isaiah: namely good news to the oppressed, liberty to captives, release of prisoners, and a bringing about of righteousness and praise that will spring up before all the nations. In this promise, there is certainly cause for rejoicing and for ultimate joy.

And that is the primary theme of the third week of Advent. Joy. So what is true authentic joy? St. Paul says, "Rejoice always," and, "give thanks at all times."

What constitutes real joy? Our first response perhaps, is to think of something that has happened in our past...something we have experienced that was very positive, comforting and made us happy at some level. It perhaps gave us a sense of peace and safety and trust. Yet, we might ask, how profound and lasting and deep was that joy? Nothing less than an experience initiated by God will move us to true joy.

Perhaps we can look at Mary's experience at the Annunciation where she prays the **Magnificat** proclaiming, 'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour!' This is an expression of this joy.

In this, we do find the expression of pure joy. And how is this joy different from that of earthly joy and pleasure?

Look to the Cross, see how Mary suffers as she witnesses her son brutally beaten and crucified on the Cross and left to die there. Unimaginable suffering and heartache and yet an experience that is enveloped in God's great love.

True joy is in the awareness that no matter what happens, how terrible or alienating, we remain God's children awaiting and anticipating the answer to the emptiness we are experiencing in this world.

In the time of John the Baptist, the people needed direction. In our time, we need direction and John's message points us all in the right direction. Don't cling to him or to any quick fix, but to the one who brings new life and heals the soul.

And that takes patience, faith, and recognition of our inadequacies and of our need for God's help. And when we ask the Spirit of God to move in our lives we are asking the Spirit to take us along for the ride. We don't have a lot of control over where that takes us.

It also recognizes that it's not helpful to dwell on all that's wrong with the world. Our part in making the world a better place is allowing the Spirit to lead us ever forward in love. Amen