

Advent 3A
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
December 15, 2019
The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem

Isaiah 35:1-10 Canticle 15 (Song of Mary) James 5:7-10 Matthew 11:2-11

“Joy”

Today is “joy” Sunday, Gaudete Sunday, our Advent respite from patient waiting for the light of Christ. The rose/pink candle tradition comes from today’s reading from Isaiah. “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom: like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing”. (A previous translation of "crocus" was "rose.")

One of the powerful messages on this Advent Sunday is that the joy of the gospel cannot be taken from us by anyone or anything. Joy. We know intellectually about joy, and yet may struggle to find ongoing joy in

Shopping

Wrapping

Cooking

Baking

Decorating

Getting ready

Preparing

Or not preparing, because our house is quiet in a very new way this year?

Our challenge and our gift is to seek joy in all of the activities in the coming days. If you are shopping, relax, hear the music, sing along if that has meaning to you; think about the smiles on the face of the person who will receive your gift. Cook with thanks for those who will gather around your table.

In these practices: listening, singing, praying, thinking, being thankful and aware, we experience the joy of the Lord. God is with us every day – that is God’s promise – that when two or three are gathered, God is present.

For those of us who might be feeling stressed or sad, Isaiah’s prophetic words offer a poetic picture of hope and joy. We have the promise, true then and true today: “Your God will come... to save you.” That God will come and does come to save us is the message of Advent every year. Isaiah gives that promise particularity:

when God comes to save us, God will transform our desert into a garden and create a highway from exile to home.

John the Baptizer, from his jail cell, was in profound need of hope. Ask Jesus, he directed, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we waiting for another?” There is despair in his question, a deep concern that we may share. Will Jesus really come again? Can I experience Jesus now?

Jesus’ answer is not the easy one; it rarely is. Instead of saying, “I am the Messiah,” Jesus tells us to share what it is that we see. Jesus says: go back to John and tell him your stories. Tell him *my* stories. Tell him what your eyes have seen and your ears have heard.”

Let John know that there is a world *right now* in which blind persons see, that people who cannot walk, do walk, and that people are made whole, healed, in unimaginable ways. There is a world *right now* in which miracles happen. That world sits side by side with the world in which bad things happen; that same world is where we find ourselves today. It is we, the living disciples, who decide which stories we will tell.

Tell the stories of God-with-us. Tell the stories about seeds that are planted in darkness and grow toward Christ’s light. Tell the stories about your – our – places of exile in which we have found a straightened path to home. Tell about the joy in a single ornament on an evergreen, the remembered taste of a special treat, the thankfulness for special, ordinary times. Tell the stories in the ways that we live, in the traditions that we uphold, in the hope that we have that Christ, with us even now, will indeed come again.

I share a prayer by Henri Nouwen about Advent time:

Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.d

We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day.

We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us.

We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom.

We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence.

We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light. To you we say,
"Come Lord Jesus!"

--**Henri Nouwen**, *An Advent Prayer*, (2001)