

3 Advent, Year B
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
December 13, 2020

Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11 Psalm 126 1 Thess 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, among other works this poem, written from his prison cell:

By gentle powers faithfully surrounded,
Held and heartened by God's marvelous care,
So let us live these heavy times together
And together face the trials we must bear. [+AW: Hymnal 695 text is a paraphrase of this poem]

There are trials today ... and in every decade since the world began; each hardship has a characteristic of its own ... and always, as a community of faith and in faith in Jesus Christ –

We live these times together, however it is that we live and meet.

We are together in Word and sacrament, in prayer –
As Paul writes, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances.” In 2020, I might have been heavy in praying and a bit light in making those prayers ones of rejoicing and giving thanks ...

And then we greet the third Sunday of Advent with the word: Rejoice!

The ancient hymn's opening words are:
“Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice! The Lord is near (Phil 4:4-5).”

Our rose-colored candle is the one that reminds us that the Lord is near – one more Sunday in Advent, and then comes the time for which we are waiting: the Christ child comes to us again. What does it mean to you that the Christ comes to us as a baby? Perhaps you feel a connection to Bonhoeffer's words of gentle power, like the gentleness of an infant sleeping. Or “faithfully surrounded,” as Mary and Joseph stayed near. You might be thinking about sleepless nights and pacing the hallways with a fussy child who will not be soothed ... again I say, rejoice.

How difficult it is for us to say “rejoice!” when anxious times consume our days! I wonder if Adam, might have wanted to argue with God about which rib to take? Or did he say “I rejoice” that I have been given a help-mate, a comforter and friend.

The words of Isaiah help us remember **why** we rejoice:
The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me ...
We are anointed with the spirit of God, made in God’s image,

And **how** we rejoice:
To bring good news, to bind up, proclaim good news, to comfort ... we are preparing to be given all of those things ... from a barn, with bits of dirt and the wrapping of swaddling cloths.

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord!” writes Isaiah; you and I, centuries later, are called to do no less.

So with the psalmist we (might as well) proclaim: “The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoice.”

Rejoice, brothers and sisters,
That we are and will be wrapped in the love of God,
In heavy times
And in every trial,

That even in a prison cell the disciple Paul wrote about the Good News of Jesus Christ,
And Dietrich Bonhoeffer reached out to his family and friends,

And through these testimonies
And others

We know that we can rejoice in all things. That we can pray through every desert of our lives,
That all of the precursors to Jesus
Are voices,

And that Jesus alone is the Word.

John the baptizer said: I am the voice.

John the gospel writer reminds us that
“in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.”

Nothing can take away our rejoicing because nothing can keep Jesus, the light of the world, *from* the world.

Take time in the coming week to rejoice.

Here God’s promise in the words of hymn 695:

1 By gracious powers so wonderfully sheltered,
and confidently waiting come what may,
we know that God is with us night and morning,
and never fails to greet us each new day.

Rejoice, friends, rejoice.