

Advent Reading 2018: Joy

Good morning. I'm _____ and this is my _____ and children _____ . This is the fourth Sunday in Advent and we will be lighting the candle representing joy.

When Jesus was born the angel said to the shepherds,

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10-11 ESV).

Just before His death and resurrection, Jesus told His disciples,

“you have sorrow now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (John 16:22).

Joy bookends Jesus' first advent. There was joy at the incarnation and joy at the resurrection. Joy was a distinguishing mark of the early Christians, despite persecution and suffering. Jesus had told them their joy could not be taken, and it wasn't.

What kind of joy is beyond the reach of joy-stealing people in a joy-robbing world? Often, we contrast happiness and joy, saying happiness is based on circumstances but joy is beyond circumstances. This is not true. Happiness and joy both are human responses to circumstances. The difference is in degrees. Happiness tends to be our response to pleasant surface circumstances – close parking spots, no homework, Christmas shopping finally being over. Joy is deeper than happiness and more fundamental to being human. We were made for joy and we experience joy when we experience life as “good” in the biblical sense of flourishing, thriving, and whole. So Christian joy is most certainly based upon circumstances. Our unsteal-able joy arises from knowing Jesus has established eternally the relationships between God and His creation (renewal), between our lives and God's presence (redemption), and between our future and the fullness of God's goodness waiting for us (restoration). Nothing in creation can kill, steal, or destroy the work of Christ in us; nothing and no one can take this joy. Our new circumstances – forgiven, adopted, destined, protected, beloved, and restored to God while being restored to His image – are sure and true and yes.

That is why Christmas sparked rejoicing has been growing as the “good news” spreads across the globe and over the ages. God has visited us to save. The glory of God dwelt among His people. One day, the whole world will be full of God's glory again and so will our lives. This is really good news from which really great joy arises, a joy no one can take from us.

And according to John in the book of Revelation... the greatest rejoicing is yet to come, when Christ comes again.

“Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready” (Rev 19:7 ESV).

Light the fourth purple candle.