

Advent 3, December 14, 2014

He's Got the Joy, Joy, Joy

Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11



Dear Friends in Christ

Introduction: Where do you find joy? What gives you joy?

Today we observe the third Sunday of Advent, which is known as the “Gaudete Sunday” Gaudete is a Latin word for “Joy or rejoice,” and it is based on the Epistle reading for today, where Paul tells us, actually commands us to “Rejoice always.”

But how do we rejoice? Where do we find joy?

What gives us joy?

There's a lot of happiness around us this time of year—in Christmas decorations, music, gifts, food, family, and friends. “Joy to the World,” we sing. We look for joy in similar ways all through the year—in fun experiences, by acquisition of material things we like, in the company of people we like and who like us. But there's a joy, a deeper joy that is brought to us during advent, in the events of Advent and Christmas. And that joy is found in the proclamation and in the working of our Salvation, where Christ alone gives us true joy.

The season of Advent, to be sure, does bring joy, but not in the way we are drawn to believe, not in the way of the flesh or the world. Joy is not found in the elation of Christmas celebration, in food, or the presents and even family gatherings. To be sure celebrations are good for they bring the family and friends together, but the joy in those things is not complete. Remember that as soon as Christmas is over, the “January blues” will set in, and will dissipate the joy you get from the Christmas celebrations. All the joy you accumulated during this time will disappear in January. No sooner after your Christmas presents were opened, and even perhaps exchanged or returned to the store, the joy will disappear, for some it will be slow but for others will be rather faster.

People we encounter in our daily routine, events and circumstances we face daily will frustrate us as well and even make us doubtful about God.

Six hundred years before Jesus was born, God's people of Judah lost their joy, so severely, when they were exiled in Babylon. Their homes and temple were destroyed, their friends and family killed. It was their own fault for being attached to so many things other than the true God, Yahweh. In the same way it can happen to us. And maybe it has happened already. If it has happened already, if you have lost true joy or true joy has escaped you lately, then remember that on this Joy Sunday we are promised true joy to those who haven't had any, and to those who lost it, it will be restored as well. We are promised the true Joy that comes from God only.

To those people of Judah who had lost their joy, were promised joy as well. They were promised to be gathered as one nation and even become God's priests. God said: “but you shall be called the priests of the LORD; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast.”

This was good news that certainly produced joy in each one of those people. And even better when that promise became a reality. For that joy would come through the bringer of good news who was also promised. Whom Isaiah describes in this way: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.” (Vs. 1–3)

Now, who is this who has the Spirit of the Lord? You know him, if not you are about to know him, it is the Messiah, Jesus Christ! Who here in this text Isaiah was first prophesying he was to come and what was his mission going to be. The mission of the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One!

And just as Isaiah prophesied it happen. When Jesus begun His mission, his work, the Scriptures tell us that the Spirit was seen on him at his baptism in the Jordan River (Jn 1:33). And later on He said how this prophecy was fulfilled in him.

This is what happened while he was at a synagogue in his home town of Nazareth: “The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:16–21).

On that day Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled for the people then, but also for us today. Christ brings true joy—joy in, joy at Christmas and always! (vv 1–2). This joy comes in what Jesus does for each one of you! It comes when Jesus gives us His word, in the hearing of that word, and in its resounding each day of our lives.

But when God's word comes into your hearing, His work takes shape. And just what shape does it take?

First, your brokenness is bandaged! The brokenness caused by your sin. When you sin, when you go against God's commandments not only you will suffer condemnation for eternity but there is also the immediate consequence of your sin which leaves you broken inside, and even on the outside as well. But Jesus' blood becomes the healing balm with which he covers you.

Our sins oppress us as well, and they hold us captive to the same sin if we leave it unchecked. But when we confess them to God, He releases us from that captivity turning it into freedom. Christ's Spirit liberates you to live as God wants you to live. And as you live your life God assures you of His favor, every day—the whole “year” because all through you have God's loving acceptance because of Christ.

And as evil and death are conquered—there's no greater elation than at God's victory over this world's greatest problem, our sins, and anything else we suffer in this world.

Because of His death on the cross, you now have actual happiness instead of the sadness of this death-filled world—you now have the same Spirit that's upon him and through that Spirit gives you the fruit of love, joy, peace, and so on (Gal 5:22–23). So now, your joy is no longer contingent on earthly things! For the joy of Christ liberates you from all of that captivity!

Now notice what the prophet tells us today: “Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed.”

The word “Offspring” in this verse literally means “seed.” This word is used as a reference to Christ in both the Old and New Testaments (Gal 3:16). In other words Offspring stands for Christ, who shall be known among the nations, and the descendants, that is you and me and our children, will be known among the people that we belong to the Offspring, to Christ. After all the Seed, Christ, has been “sown” in your joyful family and in other Christian relationships, and as you bask in this joy, others will see him as the source of your joy.

Now, how does this joy look like in your daily life? Think of a big wedding celebration (v 10)! At that wedding, there is a beautiful couple, and this couple is Jesus and you. And are holding hands, hand in hand, looking towards a bright future. And this hand-and-hand relationship is not just for the wedding day but it extends to a day-by-day celebration.

At a wedding, love and unity is the cause of the celebration, just as our righteousness in Christ brings forth our daily praise. And like in a marriage joy is found in the partaking of life's path together, husband and wife, and children, in the same way joy comes in following Jesus in what he is doing in this world. Following Christ and taking part in what he does for the sake of others brings joy as well.

No wonder the apostle Paul taught us: “complete my joy” he said, “by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:2-3) But this can only happen “if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy.” (Philippians 2:1) he said and that is what the freedom of Christ brings.

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” Paul adds. Then he says: “...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

What does working out your salvation means? It means practicing your salvation. The fact is that our joy increases and gets richer as we do what Christ did, as we display our salvation through acts that Jesus himself came to do and now does through us.

And what does Jesus do, again? Hear once more what his mission is: “...has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour...; to comfort all who mourn.”

There are some things that only Jesus can do, but there others that He involves us in the process. For example: He commands, equips and leads some to bring the Good News, preached and taught, shared and demonstrated through words and deeds

here in our community and beyond. Others proclaim and are involved in freeing captives, not only spiritual captives but physical captivity, here and other parts of the world. We hear of organizations that work with human trafficking, we can get involved! Or we can start our own projects for the sake of human freedom and protection.

Jesus comforts so that in turn we can comfort others, those who are hurting and mourning, with the same message that we have been comforted and we are called also to incite a transformation in our communities with a new life style in Christ, and with the message of hope.

The Lord calls us, enables us, and directs as we partake of His mission here on earth, and as you do, your joy increases, actually multiplies for it is a joy that is given by God through Christ, as you work out your salvation.

The Bolivia story...

Friends, there is joy beyond words in Christ, joy that continues as you serve him and one another.

Conclusion: Good feelings based on earthly things do not last. In fact, sinful and selfish pursuits often associated with those things and people and events cause the destruction of godly joy. At Christmas and always, your focus is to see and hear a voice producing true joy—the saving Word of Jesus!