

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
December 12, 2021 – 3 Advent
Joy
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

In the church calendar today is known as “Gaudete Sunday,” or “Rejoice Sunday.” [“Gaudete” is the Latin word for rejoice.] Worship on the third Sunday of Advent traditionally begins with the words “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Today our Prayers of the People begin with these words. In churches that use purple as the color of vestments and hangings during Advent, rose may be used for the third Sunday of Advent, so this is also sometimes called “Rose Sunday.” The pink candle on the Advent wreath is lighted today. The theme of the day expresses the joy of anticipation at the approach of Christmas – “Joy to the world! The Lord is come.” Appropriate to the day, joy is the Advent theme we will focus on this morning.

In the past two weeks we have considered Advent themes of hope and faithfulness. You may remember from last week that – like faithfulness – joy is one of the Fruits of the Holy Spirit identified by St. Paul. In other words, joy is one of the possible “results” in a person's soul and life of the work of God and the cooperative work of God and a human being who intends to walk in God's way of love.

There is so much that can be said about joy! Where to begin? I decided that this morning I would share wisdom about joy from a book which I highly recommend to you – “The Book of Joy” by His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet and Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu. I strongly urge you to read this wonderful book and consider sharing it with others as a gift this Christmas. It's a delightful and inspiring and wise book with much to teach.

As you may know, these two great spiritual leaders are close friends. They met together in April 2015 in Dharamsala, India to celebrate the Dalai Lama's eightieth birthday. During their visit they spoke together at length about joy – what it is, its sources and the obstacles to joy. “The Book of Joy” records their profound reflections and includes forty pages of practices from the Buddhist and Christian traditions that can assist the growth of joy. I have chosen just a very few highlights of the book to share with you now.

The Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu come from very different religious traditions, yet there is much about their thought and spiritual experience that is similar. Both of these joyful men agree that joy comes from within and is not necessarily dependent upon pleasant external circumstances. Their own lives demonstrate that joy is not inevitably marred or eclipsed by suffering, even suffering on a very large scale. Human beings are tempted to seek joy and happiness from external sources, but in that we are misdirected. Joy comes from within, both from spiritual practices and as the result of our choices about how to live.

Spiritual practices may increase our joy. The Dalai Lama explains that rejoicing is one of the “seven limbs” that are part of the daily spiritual practice in the Indian and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. When we rejoice, we celebrate our good fortune and the good fortune of others. We celebrate our good deeds and the good deeds of others. By rejoicing, we are much less likely to take life for granted. Rejoicing helps us to affirm and appreciate all that we have and all that we have done and through the practice of rejoicing our joy may increase.

Both the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu agree that compassion and generosity are the true wellsprings of joy. In this season of preparation for our yearly celebration of the birth of Jesus, it is especially fitting to remember this. As followers of Jesus, we are called to grow in compassion and generosity, to become more like Christ, all for the love of our savior. I have always found that one of the most wonderful blessings of the church is the opportunity it gives people to hear about and learn and practice a way of living that is different from the ways of the world. This is a time of year when we need that blessing to stay on our chosen path.

I would like to share what Archbishop Tutu had to say about giving to others: “Our book [the Bible] says that it is in giving that we receive. So I would hope that people would recognize in themselves that it is when we are closed in on ourselves that we tend to be miserable. It is when we grow in a self-forgetfulness – in a remarkable way I mean we discover that we are filled with joy. I’ve sometimes joked and said God doesn’t know very much math, because when you give to others, it should be that you are subtracting from yourself. But in this incredible kind of way – I’ve certainly found that to be the case so many times – you gave and it then seems like in fact you are making space for more to be given to you. And there is a very physical example. The Dead Sea in the Middle East receives fresh water, but it has no outlet, so it doesn’t pass the water out. It receives beautiful water from the rivers, and the water goes dank. I mean, it just goes bad. And that’s why it is the Dead Sea. It receives and does not give. And we are made much that way, too. I mean, we receive and we must give. In the end generosity is the best way of becoming more, more, and more joyful.”

At the end of the dialogues between Archbishop Tutu and the Dalai Lama, the Archbishop gave this blessing. My hope is that each of us may take his words to heart, be filled with the love of God and find holy joy now and forever.

“Dear Child of God, you are loved with a love that nothing can shake, a love that loved you long before you were created, a love that will be there long after everything has disappeared. You are precious, with a preciousness that is totally quite immeasurable. And God wants you to be like God. Filled with life and goodness and laughter – *and joy*. God, who is forever pouring out God’s whole being from all eternity, wants you to flourish. God wants you to be filled with joy and excitement and ever longing to be able to find what is so beautiful in God’s creation: the compassion of so many, the caring, the sharing. And God says, Please, my child, help me. Help me to spread love and laughter and joy and compassion. And you know what, my child? As you do this – hey, presto – you discover joy.” Amen.