

Advent III Joy

In her song, **Where Do I Find My Joy**, the late Laura Smith, a singer song writer who lived much of her life in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, claims that she finds her joy hanging out clothes on the clothes line and watching them blow in the breeze, letting the telephone ring and simply choosing not to pick it up - finding joy in the simple, everyday things in life!

I often invite you to reflect, and consider where it is in your life, you find evidence of God? What is it that communicates to you, that God is present and that God loves you? Where do you find God?

During this Advent season and this preaching series, I am trying to encourage you, to allow the Advent Candles we light, to be the symbols that inspire you to consider where in your life, you find Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Wherever that is, that is also where you will discover the presence of God. There are lots of other places you can discover God.....the beauty of nature, the kindness of a stranger, the

encouragement of a friend. But in this Advent Season, I am inviting you to consider how you find the presence of Jesus Christ, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit in the midst of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

Hope, peace, joy and love are emotions. Consider joy. Some people describe it as a lightness in one's heart, a bubbling with happiness, a fresh kind of happiness. Smiles and laughter are often signs that joy is present. Emotions get expressed in our daily living. So how does joy get expressed? What does joy look like in your life? Did you see the final basketball game when the Toronto Raptors won the NBA finals? Team mates, coaches, trainers, fans, broadcasters cheered and jumped about! They hugged and clapped and shouted with joy! Have you ever seen a bunch of 5 year olds win anything? That is what joy looks like! That is unbridled joy! Have you ever seen the look on a grandmother's face, when her grandchild has just picked a

beautiful flower from her garden to present to her in love. That is what joy looks like!

I want you to think for a moment about how you express Joy in your life....when you are alone, when you are watching your favourite sporting event, when are you with a family member, when you are with some close friends having a great time.....imagine that unbenounced to you, someone is observing you as you are in a moment of great joy.....if they were to describe you in that moment, what would they see and what would they say? What would they learn about your joyfulness?

Sometimes in Scripture we find that Joy in the Lord includes the clapping and raising of hands, dancing, shouts of exhortation.

That is in fact how many people, usually in other cultures celebrate their faith. Canadians tend to be more reserved in the expression of our emotions. It is that way in our relationships with

one another. So it stands to reason that it is that way with our faith.

1 Peter 1:8-9 says, "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

Remember way back when in the days when we actually went to church? What was the Joy factor there like? Did you read body language that looked like elation to you? Did you hear uninhibited shouts of glee? Did you perhaps see anyone doing a joyful little dance with their arms in the air?

Probably not. But I hope that you saw lots of smiling faces, and that you received a warm welcome.

As children of God we are supposed to be filled with joy! Isaiah 55 verse 12 says, " You will go out in joy and be led forth in

peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.”

We sang the song that was written from this passage a few weeks ago.....is this how we left worship.....filled with joy, did you notice the mountains and hills around us bursting with joy? Were the trees clapping their hands?

Philippians 4:4 gives us yet another song we love to sing....”Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say, rejoice!” Tell me what you look like when you are rejoicing.....I want to see what Rejoicing looks like on you!

I understand that some of us are extroverts and some of us are introverts. Some of us are shy, and some of us are anything but! You know who you are! I appreciate that as individuals, there is tremendous variety in how we express our feelings. Each of us receives and processes stimulus is different.

I was talking to someone the other day who told me that as a child he never felt loved by his father. He knew, intellectually, that his

Dad loved him, but his dad never said it and rarely showed it. This person worked hard to convince himself that his dad really did love him. His dad probably loved him very much, but simply could not express his love for his son in words or actions. What a difference it would have made to both of them, if he had worked on expressing his emotions!

When it comes to Joy, I hope first of all that you examine your life, and find that joy does in fact live there. Then I hope that you will find ways to express and emote these joyful feelings!

Rejoicing, living with an attitude of abundance, overflowing with joy, clapping our hands, bursting into song!!!! Wow....doesn't that sound like a wonderful life to be living....aren't those great feelings we want to be feeling and sharing?

We can be very controlled and restrained with our expressions. We are a very careful, conservative culture. But I do wonder if there are ever times when we hide behind our inhibitions with the declaration, "Well that's just not me? I am not comfortable saying

or doing those kinds of things.” You and I have heard others say, “I wish I could be more like them, but I just can’t”

Dancing, clapping, singing, jumping about...celebrating!

I am not for a moment being critical about how you and I respond to things in life and I am certainly not trying to be negative about how we express our faith as Christians. But I do want us, you and me to take a look at what we say and what we do.

I know that you express your faith in all sorts of ways.....you do good things for others, you are kind, and patient. You work hard at putting others first. You look for ways to be generous. You strive to grow in your faith and in your discipleship.....I know and appreciate that!

Scripture is very clear that no spiritual gift is greater than another. So joy, and the expression of joy is not the be all and end all. There are many other fruits of the spirit that live generously in you and which you express into the lives of others. So please do not feel

put down or inadequate. But do consider this particular message of Joy this Advent.

Advent is an amazing opportunity for us to examine how we experience our faith, and then how we live out our faith. Are we intentional about accessing the hope, the peace, the joy and the love that God is offering us? Do we ever even consider it? Can we grow in our capacity to feel and express more hope, more peace, more joy, and more love? Can we at least think about it?

This little three letter word Joy. When do you feel joyful? What aspect of Christ's message sparks joy in you? What is it about worship that brings you joy? What part of being a member of a faith community brings you joy? When you think of ways that you live out your faith, what is it that sparks joy? Some of you brought in winter coats and boots, socks, touques, mitts and gloves for the homeless this past week.....did that give you joy? Some of you participate in the music ministry, or a particular committee, or study group or pastoral care.....what is it about your ministry that sparks

joy in you? It is important that you take stock of your spiritual life and identify how the Joy factor is already present and perhaps how you can raise that joy factor!

For Laura Smith it brought her joy to hang out her wet clothes on the line and watch them blow in the breeze. As a member of this Christian community, what are all the things that bring you joy.....by being a part of this church, by being a child of God, by being the person God calls you to be with the many gifts he has given you.

You are blessed. Continue to find joy as you bring blessing to others. Grow in your confidence and in your willingness to express that joy, so that we all might share in it!

Amen