

## Sermon on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent Year B

In Paul's 1st letter to the Thessalonians he encouraged them to rejoice always, this runs contrary to what most of us are feeling with the kind of year we have all had. Some have lost close family and friends to the virus, jobs and homes are threatened, separated from loved ones and a lot of uncertainty in our lives now all because of covid -19 even though there is a silver lining with the coming into use the first vaccine. How can we rejoice in the present circumstances where people's lives across the world has been greatly disrupted, but that is what we are commanded by God to do, says Paul especial on this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent. This because traditional the Third Sunday of Advent is known as Gaudete Sunday, that means rejoice in Latin.

Today is also a day the Church reflect on John the Baptist, the witness, forerunner of Jesus, ironically is not associated with rejoicing. However John spoke about joy not in our text this morning but later in chapter 3 of John's gospel, he points the way to Jesus in his response, You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, " I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him". He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason, my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. John was filled with joy with the coming of Jesus as he sees God's purpose being fulfilled.

Bishop Jonathan writes, "Joy is a response, something that can only arise in us unbidden. We cannot choose to be joyful

because it is in the nature of joy, as in the title of C S Lewis' autobiography, that we are surprised by it, not in control of it. Joy does not calculate or balance one thing against another. To experience joy even when there is also much cause for sadness, does not deny grief; to be joyful in the face of injustice does not contradict anger. What joy does contradict is fear: just like love, joy casts out fear.

Joy does not contradict the unhappiness of our world, but provides us with a resource to fight it. If we are sucked into a basic despair about the condition of humanity or of our planet, there is nothing to give us strength in working for the world to be better. Joy is the response to what we are already given, that opens up to us a better way of living. Joy is the response to the miracle of goodness, of love and beauty whenever we find it, even in the middle of illness, even during a pandemic. It is the human response to the miracle of God.

Joy is the concrete sign in the present of the hope that Christians have in the future. It is the experience in the now of what we believe God intends for all of creation in the fullness of time. As such, joy is more than a feeling – it is something quite beyond mere happiness. It is a reality that exists as part of the Christian belief in the incarnation of Christ. Christ has come in the flesh; therefore, there is cause for joy in the world. Christ is risen; therefore, there is hope. It is in that sense that we can be commanded to rejoice. It can't mean that we have to have the experience of joy in every moment of our life, because that is exactly the state for

which we long and hope, that is the life of the kingdom which we know only too well is not yet fulfilled. But we can be ready and responsive. Strengthened by the good news of Christ, we can take the risk of being open to the world around us, which means being open to the sorrow as well as to the joy. The opposite is to be closed off, to try not to be affected, which is the way to emotional and spiritual starvation and death.

The more we are open to joy, the more joyful the world is. Joy is magnified and reflected in our experience of it – it's not something we would want to keep to ourselves. There is not a set quantity of joy in the world – it can multiply, or it can be killed off. If we are just left to ourselves, sometimes we'll be overtaken by joy, sometimes by its enemies of fear or despair. It is in Christ that we are enabled to see joy, to share joy, not as a random feature of a chaotic world, but as part of the hidden reality, the underlying, purpose of the God who will finally reconcile us all in the joyful kingdom.

John the Baptists' role as a joyful witness to Jesus makes him a great Advent figure. His witness not only prepares the way for Jesus but also provides an example for us. We stand up and say what we know to be the truth about God and about Jesus. We stand beside John the Baptist and the other great characters of the Fourth Gospel, and bear witness to what we know and believe about the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. In this witness we can and should "rejoice always." Amen

