

Homily - Dec 15, 2024- 3rd Sunday of Advent, Year C - Timestamp (part 2) 3:35 - 27:47

Have you ever had a bad day? Have you ever been overwhelmed and glum? And then somebody - well-meaning of course - walks up and says, "Oh cheer up!" How does that make you feel?

Boom! "No, I don't want to cheer up! Leave me alone. I am perfectly happy being miserable," which is kind of what's going on in our head. You know one of those silent conversations. But really we just go, "Well, thank you." We sound like one of the characters of the early years of Saturday Night Live, "Well, thank you!"

It's very difficult when we're in a bad spot to hear what we've heard in all of the Scripture this morning First Reading, Psalm, Second Reading, Gospel: "Rejoice!" Because if we're not there it's hard. It's kind of like, "Leave me alone! Just leave me alone!"

The people of Zephaniah's time...Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah the prophet and we know how hard a life Jeremiah had. And what eventually happened.

Early in Jeremiah's time, Zephaniah prophesied and gave the people some very clear warnings about their behavior, the religious authorities, the king. He really put it to them. But in the midst of that, he tells them to rejoice for the Holy One of God was going to come into their midst.

They were afraid not only of Zephaniah's prophecy, which told them you're not behaving correctly, but they also knew from his prophecy that a very bad thing was going to happen, which was fulfilled in Jeremiah's time. The city would be conquered and they would be overrun and many taken away into exile.

But even in the midst of that the prophet says, "Rejoice!"

Our Psalm came from Isaiah Chapter 12. We hear part of this very often at the Easter Vigil. It's talking about that wonderful water that cleanses, that gives life, even in the midst of that which is not life-giving. And Isaiah also uses that word, "Rejoice!"

And then of course Paul to the Philippians. Do you know where Paul was when he wrote the letter to the Philippians? He was in prison. Now do you think he was having some bad days? What do you think? I think he was. You think he was. I'm sure he was, but what he does in this chapter, Chapter 4 - What does he say? "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say Rejoice!"

Now the people of Philippi did not have a reason not to rejoice, but they knew his circumstances and I'm wondering if they kind of wondered how he could be so happy.

And then of course John the Baptist comes. We know John the Baptist proclaimed repentance and a change of life. He even gives practical advice to the crowds - to the tax collectors and the soldiers - practical advice to live out the good news. To show that yes, the good news is in your midst.

Which means this is the kind of behavior that will bring about the breaking in of the kingdom. Good news even though the people were under the Romans.

Tax Collectors were outcasts and Roman soldiers were hated, but still he gives them in their desire for baptism an indication of how to return the gift that they have been given.

Now in the First Reading God is the actor. God is the one who brings the reasons for joy. In the Gospel it's these people who have been baptized who are now asked to be the "bringers of the good news" and the joy.

When you walked in here this morning was your life difficult, not because you had to come to church, but is there something in your life that's really not going well? A challenge? A child? - (Not you. You're perfect.) A physical condition?

And then you hear "Rejoice, Rejoice, Rejoice!" Why?

There is a scripture scholar who wrote a commentary for this weekend's readings and he had a point that struck me so much, I kept running it through my brain. He said very clearly when you're not in one of those spaces where you want to Rejoice or can, then find thankfulness. Go back to those moments when things have been good, when God has revealed his presence in your life, when someone in the family was overly caring for you.

Think of how you have heard the good news before and it made a difference. And be thankful. And based on that thankfulness you will now be able to have a decision made that is to rejoice. To rejoice does not just bubble up. We have to make the decision in the midst of life.

And that was his genius.

You have to be thankful first to be able to actually decide yes I'm going to remember those things. And over those, I will rejoice and know that God will get me through.

I've been carrying that around for a few days now and it works even when this goes. "This" (notes his sling) being that awful yuck, teaching me a whole new level of patience. And I'm failing most days.

But anyway, Paul insists that we rejoice and so I'm going to give you the opportunity to do that. Are you ready? I'm going to plant an earworm in your brain. Are you ready?

Go to the readings for today I don't, number 999. Now go to the Second Reading.

See Paul's words, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again, Rejoice." Okay here's what I want you to do. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice. Leave the "it" out.

Are you ready? Greg, where are you? Can you give me a note please? So that we get in the right key? Okay I'm going to sing this through and then invite you to repeat it. The choir is going to help us. Then after the second time, we're going to sing the first part and the choir is going to sing the second part.

Are you ready? Thank you Greg.

Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I say rejoice! Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I say Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! Again I say Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! Again I say rejoice!

You've heard this before? Well good!

All right here's the second time. Let's do it together and then we'll go to the third and the choir will sing their part and we'll sing ours. Okay, we only do the first part on the third time because they're going to do the Rejoice part on top of us. You ready?

Congregation:

Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I say rejoice! Rejoice in the Lord always! (x3)

Again I say rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! Again, I say rejoice!

Choir:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Again I say rejoice! (x3)

Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I say rejoice!

Let's carry that now through to the season of Christmas.