

GAYLORD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Third Sunday of Advent - Joy

December 13, 2020

Meditation

Zephaniah 3:1-16-17



"...the announcement to Jerusalem will be, 'Cheer up, Zion! Don't be afraid!
For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior.
He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears.
He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.'"

Welcome and News of the Church

Statement of Welcome

**No matter who I am, No matter where I am on life's journey, I am welcome here.
No matter who you are, no matter where you are on life's journey, You are
welcome here!**

Statement of Purpose

One: Who are you?	All: I am a beloved child of God!
One: What does that mean?	All: I am a person of worth to be valued!
One: Then what will you do?	All: I will live a life of Love and Acceptance of myself and all God's people!

The Call

Psalm 126

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."
The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.
Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.
May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.
Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with
shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Prelude

Sandy Wentzloff

Light the Advent Candles:

Leader: O Holy One,
We light this third candle, and delight in the sparkle of its outrageous reminder to
"rejoice!" Let its flame cast light into shadowy places and show where work is to be
done. Let a community of builders be formed in The Light of Joy.
Let Joy find home in our hearts, and make space for your presence there,
as we work for justice and peace in the service of Love.

People: God be with us in this Light of Joy.

Choral Response

"Christ Be Our Light"

**Refrain: Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts, Shine through the darkness
Christ be our light! Shine in your Church gathered today.**

Verse: Longing for light, we wait in darkness. Longing for truth we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people, light for the world to see.

Refrain: Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts, Shine through the darkness

Christ be our light! Shine in your Church gathered today.

Verse: Longing for peace, our world is troubled. Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save us. Make us your living voice.

**Refrain: Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts, Shine through the darkness
Christ be our light! Shine in your Church gathered today.**

Call to Worship

Leader: Rejoice! The spirit of God is sending us:

**People: To bring good news to the oppressed, to comfort the brokenhearted, to
proclaim liberty to the captives, to proclaim the year of favor among God's
people.**

Leader: Rejoice! The work of the Spirit is calling us:

**People: To rebuild ancient relationships ruined by injustice,
To repair the cities as places of hope,
To restore land devastated across generations.
to proclaim the year of favor among God's people.**

Leader: Rejoice! The Glory of the Spirit is leading us:

**People: To cast off any faint spirit and put on the mantle of praise,
To take root as the plantings of the HOLY ONE, to display God's glory.**

Leader: Come, let us worship in Joy!

Hymn

"IT CAME UPON THE MIDNIGHT CLEAR"

NCH #131

**It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold;
"Peace on the earth, good will to all, great news of joy we bring."
The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.**

**For lo, the days are hastening on, by prophet bards foretold,
when with the ever-circling years comes round the age of gold.
When peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling,
And all the world send back the song which now the angels sing.**

Invocation

Holy One, Builder who delights in making spaces of safety and beauty,
Matchmaker who rejoices in presenting new spouses with a future of hope,
fill us today with the gifts we need to join you in your life-sustaining,
hope-giving work in the world; let us share your joyful vision of beauty and justice
in this world you have created and loved.

In the name of the One who is coming,

Amen.

Witness to Joy

Instead of a typical Confession of Sin, today let us try something that may be equally
challenging in light of the difficult year we have spent:

Let's give witness instead to signs of Joy in our midst, signs that our God is doing something
new, and calling us to faithfulness in our contexts.

Think of signs of hope, of encouragement, of change, of comfort, that point to the
Holy One at work.

Silence

Assurance of Grace

Holy One,

we give you thanks that you meet us in our struggles, and call us into a future of hope and joy. You have promised to be faithful, and we open our hearts to you in trust, in the name of the one you send, Jesus.

Doxology

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise God all creatures here below
Praise God above you heavenly hosts
Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

Lectionary Text

Luke 1:46b-55

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

John 1:6-8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ ” as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Gloria

**Glory be to Creator, and to the Christ and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be
World without end, Amen. Amen.**

Message

“God’s Got a Dream!”

There is a poem written by Langston Hughes and it goes like this:

***Hold fast to dreams
For life without dreams
Is like a bird with a broken wing
That cannot fly.***

Hold fast to dreams. Dreams are important, aren't they! Did you know that God has a dream? God has a dream! God has a vision, a dream for God's creation. God has a dream for every woman, man and child whoever walked upon the face of the earth.

We hear something about God's dream in several of our Advent scriptures. We hear of God's dream in the words of Isaiah's lofty vision - ***"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the captives, and release to the prisoners and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."***

We hear God's dream again in John the Baptist. Some religious leaders came to him and asked him "Are you the Messiah?" John answers, "I am not the Messiah but there is one coming who is." Because God has a vision for you and this world. God has not abandoned God's creation and the Messiah (Jesus) is coming because God has a dream for all humanity.

And then in our Psalm for today- 126, we read, ***"When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy."***

God has a dream. God has dream for every one of us. A vision of life that reflects God's dream for the world, for society, for you and for me. God has a dream.

The Psalmist lived in the time of a nightmare. The people of Israel had lived and dwelt in their land as a free people- God's people. But a time came when a foreign power, the Babylonians, attacked them and the Israelites became a defeated people. They were taken out of their land, the Promised Land, and marched 900 miles away and there in Babylon they were held for over 50 years as slaves. They were exiles. Life for them was bitter. Nothing was the way it had previously been. They had lost so much. Nothing was the same for them.

But in time, God acted. Silently. God acted! And the Babylonians were overthrown by another empire, the Persians. And the Persians set the Israelites free. After 50 long years, they could go back home. And as they went back home somebody said and remembered, "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, then we were like those who dream. It was like a dream come true.

God has a dream. And we want to hold fast to dreams. Because life without a dream is like a bird who can't fly. But with a dream- God's dream- we can soar!

Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry tells of a time when he was in Botswana in southern Africa. He was there to visit a number of congregations and ministries. The experience that stood out for him on this trip was a visit to a day-care at St. Peter's Church in Gaborone, the capital city. It's located in an impoverished section of the capital. As his van pulled into the courtyard, they were greeted by the pastor and his wife. The pastor took Bishop Curry to the far side of the courtyard where the children were sitting. They were sitting in the shade listening to Bible stories and singing songs. Now the kids were three, four, five years old and so as the visitors came over to them, the children stood up and began to sing. You may know the song: "Good morning to you, good morning to you, we're all in our places with bright shiny faces, good morning to you." The pastor introduced Bishop Curry to the children and then the pastor invited the bishop to share a bible story with the children. The bishop told them a story and then led them in the song "Praise ye the Lord." You may know this one! One group of kids stood up and sang "Hallelu, hallelu, hallelu, Hallelujah." And while they sat back down another group of kids would stand up and sing "Praise Ye the Lord." And during this Bishop Curry noticed that one little girl sitting in a crude chair did not stand up.

After another song the pastor dismissed the children to go play. Off they went, running to the playground on the other side of the courtyard. Everyone went, except this one little girl. She had one

of those crutches- you know the kind that wrap around the wrist. So, she took that one crutch and staked it in the ground and pulled herself up from the chair. She had shorts on and you could see her weak legs trying to walk. She walked haltingly but with a sense of determination. She started moving and picked up a little speed BUT then she fell. And those watching wanted to help her but they knew that they had to let her do it.

She took the crutch and staked it in the ground and pulled herself up again and continued to walk toward the other kids. While she was walking, Bishop Curry asked the pastor "What's her story?" The pastor said the head of the daycare goes into the neighborhoods looking for children who may not be cared for, who may need the daycare center. The director heard about this child who was living with her grandparents. The girl's parents had both died. The girl was not ambulatory. She was bedridden and the grandparents were trying to do the best that they could do. But she was receiving no medical care.

The grandparents allowed the church and the day care to intervene. And they did. The church sent medical folk and physical therapists and they worked with the little girl. They brought her to the daycare center every day. And slowly, but surely, she was able walk with that crutch.

While the pastor was telling this story, the little girl fell again as she was walking with that one crutch toward the other children. Again, everyone wanted to help but the pastor said, "Leave her be." And once again, that little girl took that crutch, staked it in the ground, raised herself up and continued to walk painfully, haltingly, but determinedly, toward the other children. And as she approached the other children, the pastor said, "We believe that God has something better in store for every child. And it is our job to help each child find out what that is, and then rise up and live!"

My friend, we who would follow Jesus of Nazareth believe that God has something better in store for this world. God has something better in store for every man, woman and child who ever walked the face of the earth. God has something better in store for God's creation and God's world. This is the dream of God! This dream of God is what Jesus is all about. He came to show us the way to live God's dream instead of our nightmare. Jesus came to show us the way to be truly and genuinely human as God intended and created us. Jesus came to show us how to become more than simply an individual collection of self-interests. He came to show us how to become the human family of God. And THIS is the dream of God.

God's got a dream! A dream for you. A dream for me. A dream for all.

Beloved children of God, hold fast to God's dream. And then, rise up and live!

Hymn

"Rise Up, O Saints of God!"

Pilgrim Hymnal #300

**Rise up, O saints of God! Have done with lesser things;
Give heart and soul and mind and strength to serve the King of kings.**

**Rise up, O saints of God! Tread where Christ's feet have trod;
Come sisters, brothers in the faith, Rise up, O saints of God.**

Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses and we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For you are the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Call to Offering

In struggle and in joy, God is faithful to us.

We bring forth our offerings – our tithes, our treasures, our least coins – to demonstrate our faithfulness to God.

Dedication

People: O Faithful One, accept these gifts of our hearts and hands.
May they be multiplied and magnified as the living presence
of Christ in the world. Amen.

Benediction

One: Go forth confident that God is faithful:
Those who have sowed in sorrow will return with shouts of joy
Bearing the harvest of God's work. Rejoice always—the Lord is near.

Closing Song: "Spirit Song"

O let the Son of God enfold you with his Spirit and his love.
Let him fill your heart and satisfy your soul.
O let him have the things that hold you, and his Spirit like a dove,
will descend upon your life and make you whole.

Refrain:

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.

Postlude

Sandy Wentzloff

Remember in Prayer: Jim Peterson, Bill Walsh, Greg Armstrong (Howard's brother), Dick Carlson, Bill and Nancy Cowell, Eunice Gasow, and Aggie Schue. We pray for health and healing for all people and especially those serving on the front lines caring for those with COVID-19. Pray for the ministries of our church. Pray for those serving in the military and for our local and national leaders.

Our sympathy and prayers go to Ted Pinske and family on the passing of Ted's sister-in-law Ann.

If you have a prayer request or would like to receive a call from Pastor Dennis call his office at 237-2595 (leave a private voice mail) or his cell 763-258-3371

Pastor Dennis is usually in the office each Tuesday and Wednesday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. He can be reached at the office, 237-2595 (private voice mail) or his cell: 763-258-3371. E-mail: dmckee545@gmail.com • Website at listen2god.org

Please remember how important your financial support of the ministry of Gaylord United Church of Christ is, especially in this time. We pray for wisdom of leaders, the support of us all in doing what we can to suppress the spread of corona virus, and the safety of all our friends, families, and people of the world. *God is Good, all the time.*

Tithes, Offerings, From the Heart Offering and Pledges can be sent to Gaylord United Church of Christ P.O. Box 385 Gaylord, MN 55334. *You can also donate on our website or drop off at the church office on Wednesday between 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.*

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- ❖ Our **From the Heart Offering** in December goes to **Christmas Fund**.
 - ❖ **Women's Fellowship is selling dish cloths**. Cost is \$1.00 each.
 - ❖ **Mission Board is sponsoring "Coats for Kids"** Bring your donations of gently used or new winter wear to church until the **end of the year**.