

Sermon for 15 December 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Third Sunday in Advent

Scriptures: Zephaniah 3:14-20; Psalter: Isaiah 2:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

Sermon:

Joy.

We devote this Sunday's study of thinking about the waiting quality of life, to the topic of joy.

In the first lesson, Zephaniah says we have practice exercises for joy. In his time as a prophet, King Jeroboam led the Jews of Judah in turning back to Jahweh, getting rid of statues to heathen gods, and following the book of commandments that was discovered in the temple, and looking forward to returning to their homeland... so yes, you can rejoice in hope, because God has come back after dark times before, and we are products of that. Learn to hope. It's a good habit. When I served Govans Boundary Church, over on York Road, they told me about a time they went through big changes racially and became a better church. Jeroboam's story was an important one for them then.

Then we have a lesson from the prophet Isaiah. His book spends lots of time on desperation, and some of our most beautiful descriptions of surviving come from him. And God does come, and will come again; so, whatever your circumstances, never leave out joy, as long as you live. Isaiah teaches us to practice how.

Then, in the New Testament lesson, Paul's letter to his beloved Christian friends in Philippi insists, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice!"

Last, John the Baptist shows up for the second Sunday in a row, and what does he say? Everything about joyfully waiting is turned on its head! Repent! What is it about him that draws people to him?

Beauty is tough. Tough is beautiful.

Early in the week, as I read this passage on John the Baptist, I wrote down these words.

I lived with them for days without getting any further. Then finally, on Saturday afternoon, I sat still with them. I knew was my job to make sense of them, so you could hear them in some way you could use. Preaching is important. You come hungry for it. You keep hoping.

Life is beautiful. God loves you personally. And ...not but, and ... you have to work at it. Your part of the whole picture matters; it's essential.

So yes, life is waiting, expecting, coming back to face the next of it.

And it has joy in it, for a minute, and for a thousand years .... forever, joy's there.

Everything comes from God and clicks as you work together.

Let this sink in.

Good news. Work at it.

Amen.