

Worship Resources / Harvesting Joy / <https://youtu.be/D-zWFI3PRvE>

3rd Sunday of Advent, Year B,

13th December, 2020

Psalm 126 CEV / John 1:6-8, 19-28 CEV

Prelude ***Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus,***

Music by Rowland Hugh Richard

played by church musician Annie Center,

<https://youtu.be/jovFUHLD6MU>

Intro / Call to Worship

Though we could be resentful, **we come to give thanks.**

Though we could be complaining, **we come to offer appreciation.**

Though we could be upset about what we lack, **we come in gratitude for what we have.**

We enter now into this time of worship **carrying seed to sow, singing songs of joy, rejoicing together.**

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

This morning we continue our virtual Advent candle lighting as Bill and Sylvia lead us in lighting the candle of joy.

Advent Lighting Liturgy Video *Bill and Sylvia Hershberger*

Reader 1: In a world of despair, where depression rates run high, where there has been so much sadness and loss, God, we call upon you to come.

Reader 2: In a world where joy is a distant memory, we call upon you, Great God of Joy, to come.

Reader 1: In this season of Advent, we wait for the coming of Joy into our world. We await the birth of the Anointed One, the Promised Child, who comes into our lives in a new way.

Reader 2: Come, Messiah, Come, and Save Us

Advent Candle Video with Prayer

Prayer: Dear God, we pray for the joy that is found in Jesus, that those who seek it may truly find it. May we celebrate in the joy found in You. Amen.

Music video *Hark, the Glad Sound! The Saviour Comes*

with lyrics for congregations]

performed by the Choir of Chichester Cathedral,

written by Philip Doddridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeBRYhG86x0>

In our gospel lesson this morning, we hear John the Baptist offering the promise of one who will redeem the people and the world. As we listen to these words, what joy can we find in the hope that John still offers us?

Gospel Lesson John 1:6-8, 19-28 CEV

God sent a man named John,

who came to tell about the light and to lead all people to have faith.

John wasn't that light. He came only to tell about the light.

The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and temple helpers to ask John who he was. He told them plainly, "I am not the Messiah."

Then when they asked him if he were Elijah, he said, "No, I am not!" And when they asked if he were the Prophet,^[a] he also said "No!"

Finally, they said, "Who are you then? We have to give an answer to the ones who sent us. Tell us who you are!"

John answered in the words of the prophet Isaiah, "I am only someone shouting in the desert, 'Get the road ready for the Lord!'"

Some Pharisees had also been sent to John.

They asked him, "Why are you baptizing people, if you are not the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet?"

John told them, "I use water to baptize people. But here with you is someone you don't know.

Even though I came first, I am not good enough to untie his sandals."

John said this as he was baptizing east of the Jordan River in Bethany.

Scripture Video John 1:6-8,19-28

John The Baptist Tells About Jesus

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihks1kGrNjk>

A Time of Prayer

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: vicarglenn@gmail.com, and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

Joys and Concerns

This morning, we continue to keep Carol and Jerry Bowers in our prayers, as Carol's prognosis is not good. May God give her and Jerry strength, as she transitions to hospice care at home, and may they truly experience God's peace and comfort in this difficult time.

We also remember Steve and Harriet Koscho and their family in our prayers with the passing of Steve's father this week.

Let us also remember all those who are unable to be with family this year, in our current situation. May God comfort and lift their spirits.

Finally, may we keep all those who are struggling with Covid, or who are caring for those who are ill in our prayers, as well as those who have lost loved ones to this disease.

Let's bring these concerns and others in our lives to God together in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

In a cynical and despairing world, O God, give us a quietly prophetic voice to proclaim your hope
In a violent and angry world, O God, give us a quietly prophetic voice to proclaim your peace.
In a dismissive and disinterested world, O God, give us a quietly prophetic voice to proclaim your compassion.
In a lonely and inhospitable world, O God, give us a quietly prophetic voice to proclaim your love.
In a grieving and weeping world, O God, give us a quietly prophetic voice to proclaim your joy.
May we be so captivated by your hope, O God, that we cannot help but to whisper, to sing, and to enact, the message of your reign which is always coming into our world;
And may our quietly prophetic lives, be channels of your restoring grace wherever we may go. Amen.

In our reading from Psalms this week, we hear a song of ascent often sung by the faithful as they journeyed to Jerusalem to celebrate God's providence. As we listen to these words of deliverance from hardship to rapt joy, let's reflect on how God has delivered us in times of despair, and the promise of deliverance we have today.

Psalm of the Day Psalm 126 CEV

It seemed like a dream when the Lord brought us back to the city of Zion.[a]

We celebrated with laughter and joyful songs. In foreign nations it was said, "The Lord has worked miracles for his people."

And so we celebrated because the Lord had indeed worked miracles for us.

Our Lord, we ask you to bless our people again, and let us be like streams in the Southern Desert.

We cried as we went out to plant our seeds. Now let us celebrate as we bring in the crops.

We cried on the way to plant our seeds, but we will celebrate and shout as we bring in the crops.

Scripture Video Psalm 126 *Celebrating The Harvest*

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aK515U5XRfk>

Message: Harvesting Joy

This week of Advent we lit the candle of joy. In normal years, it may not be so difficult to see the joy in our lives, or to find the joy that we attain through our faith in Christ. But it has been quite a different year, hasn't it? We have all had to adjust to our new pandemic reality. A reality that for most means not gathering with our beloved family members, not decorating and singing those age old hymns in church, not being able to go out and celebrate the holidays in our favorite establishments. Joy seems like a precious commodity right now. When times are tough, and things seem bleak, it can seem like we will not experience joy again.

Some time ago, the American Southwest experienced a devastating drought. Centuries-old pinyon trees that covered the hills throughout northern New Mexico became susceptible to bark beetles and died by the thousands. Once green

landscapes turned grey with dead trees. For longtime residents, it felt like a death in the family. Then one summer, it rained. Within days, fields of wildflowers sprang up. People could not believe their eyes. Every patch of ground was covered with yellow cow-pen daisies, purple asters, and other flowers not seen in a century. But the rain alone was not the reason for the color. The needles of the dead pinyons provided mulch and nutrients needed by long-dormant seeds. The trees would never be restored, but their death gave birth to new beauty as far as the eye could see. “We cried as we went out...we celebrate as we bring in our crops.”

Psalm 126 seems a little out of place for the third Sunday of Advent. Granted the psalm speaks of joy, even “shouts of joy.” But with the images of seeds, sowing, and sheaves of harvest, it seems better suited for Thanksgiving than Advent. A “Song of Ascents,” used by pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for a festival, it has more in common with “Come, You Thankful People” than “Come, O Long-Expected Jesus.” But a closer reading reveals its Advent message. The psalm looks for signs of God’s promise in dark and difficult times. It first reminds them in the remembrance of things past, in the joy and laughter the people knew when God brought them home from exile and even their neighbors acknowledged God’s mighty deeds on their behalf. Their remembrances can resonate with us in Advent, when we often look back at Christmas pasts to recall long ago joys and better times.

Like the psalmist, we can “remember when”: when our mouths were filled with laughter, our family was all together, our church was full, our nation was more cohesive, and the world seemed, if not joyous, at least a safer place. But Psalm 126 is not an exercise in nostalgia. The remembrance of things past has a present purpose. Recalling God’s deliverance long ago leads directly to the call for God to use that same transforming power *now*. Verse 4 even asks God to demonstrate *greater* power than before. Not content with Isaiah’s vision of “streams in the desert,” Psalm 126, if translated literally, wants “rivers or torrents” in the Negeb, a desert whose very name means “dry,” “parched,” the hottest place around. Isaiah 35 predicted that “sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” Psalm 126 proclaims such sadness will be transformed into “shouts and celebrations” of joy. In promising such joy, the psalm offers an important insight into its nature. This is no jingle bells joy bought with a credit card or holiday gathering. The seeds of this joy have been planted in sadness and watered with tears. This the honest joy that can only come after weeping has tarried into the darkness of night.

Such an understanding of joy is vital in the life of faith, particularly in Advent. For all their celebrations in more normal times, the weeks leading to Christmas can be a

time of sorrow. Sometimes we experience Advent's tears as a personal sadness, remembering a loved one who has died or a relationship that has ended. It can also be a sorrow we share as a nation or as churches, when our preparations for the Prince of Peace make us realize how far we have strayed from that path.

This year that sorrow can be even more pronounced, as our very preparations and celebrations are cancelled or postponed. Not only can we feel wistful and sad about those normal regrets and absences, our very observance of this season is radically altered. The sorrow we experience can separate us from God, particularly if we confuse Advent's true joy with our culture's teachings about happiness and prosperity.

In contrast, Psalm 126 acknowledges the reality of sorrow. It remembers and points to God's power to transform sorrow into joy. The joy the psalm both remembers and anticipates is a particular kind, namely, the joy of the harvest. One could make the argument that the psalm is better for bringing in the sheaves than preparing for the birth of the Messiah, were it not for the fact that, for the Hebrews, harvest joy celebrated far more than good crops. When the people of Israel brought their first fruits to the temple, they not only thanked God for the abundance of that particular year, they also gave their thanks for God's deliverance in the past. In Deuteronomy 26, they remembered God's faithfulness and transforming power that went all the way back to Abraham, that wandering and childless Aramean of whom God had made a great nation. Their harvest prayer also recalled how God's power had transformed them from Pharaoh's slaves to sowers of their own seed, a free people in a promised land. The natural power of God to turn seeds into grain would be miracle enough. But Psalm 126 makes an even greater statement. The seeds are not ordinary seeds, but seeds of *sorrow*. The fruit they bear is not grain or wheat, but *shouts of joy*.

This image, "sow in sorrow, reap in joy," incorporated an ancient Near East belief that weeping while you planted made the crops more productive. By linking that understanding to the celebration of God's deliverance, the psalm changes an agricultural practice into a powerful theological statement. It affirms both God's power and the people's faith. They "shall come home with shouts of joy." Thus the psalm not only calls upon God to use that transforming power, but also calls *us* to be open to its possibilities. It challenges us to trust God's joy, wherever we encounter it, in a stable in Bethlehem, at an empty tomb, or in acres of cow-pen daisies.

In our own time of sorrow and darkness, it is my hope and prayer that we remember the joy that arises in the harvest that our tears water. May we always remember the joy that follows the sad times of life, and the hope that this time too, shall pass. May that hope and joy reflect the light that John speaks of, the light that soon will enter the world yet again at Christmas. May it be so. Amen.

Call to Serve.

As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, seeking to give comfort to those in need, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. This morning, as Annie shares the following song, let's give some thought as to how we can reflect the light and promise of the coming of Immanuel, God with Us.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [video] *O Come, O Come, Immanuel,*
Trope melody, 15th c.,
played by church musician Annie Center,
https://youtu.be/14p_k4jbO7c

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

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.

Blessing/Assurance

God looks upon us with favor when we turn back to God's ways. God desires for us to love one another, to forgive one another; for then we know God's love and forgiveness ourselves. Go, care for each other's needs. Restore what has been lost, taken from others. Take a look at your own faults, and do what you can to bring healing and make peace, for Christ came to us when the angels, the heavenly host, the army of God, sang Peace on Earth and Goodwill to All. Amen.

Postlude *The Angel Gabriel , Basque Carol;*

arranged by Edgar Pettman

performed by church musician Annie Center,

<https://youtu.be/v3p19x90Gbo>