

Worship Resources *“Joyful”*

Advent 3, Year A, 11th December, 2022

James 5:7-10 NRSV / Matthew 11:2-11 NRSV

Prelude

Opening Music (Video) [*The Trumpet Child*](#) - written by Linford Detweiler

performed by the Sammamish Presbyterian Church,
posted to YouTube by Jerry Nuernberger

Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace/Hanging of the Greens

Opening Hymn *Oh, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing* 110

Call to Worship [responsive]

One: Our souls magnify the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our Savior.
All: **For the Mighty One has done great things for us; Holy is God's name.**
One: God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.
All: **God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.**
One: God helps all those who serve, in remembrance of God's mercy,
All: **According to the promises God made to our ancestors, and to us.**
One: Come, worship God, who is turning the world upside down;
All: **Worship God, who makes all things new.**

Invocation

O God, we come today echoing John the Baptist's question to your Beloved Child:
"Are you the one who is to come?"
Give us eyes to see and ears to hear the answer for ourselves:
In the work of justice: Christ!
In the practice of mercy: Christ!
In good news for the poor: Christ!
In the vision of peace: Christ!
Make us ready, with open hearts and joyful spirits,
to follow in Christ's Way. Amen.

Epistle Reading: James 5:7-10 NRSV

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.

You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!

As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Lighting The Advent Candle

On the third Sunday of Advent, we feel the joy of God that comes to us through the birth of Christ. We remember how Mary sang a song of joy before Jesus was born, of how God was going to make all things new. We sing our own songs of joy, knowing that even when we are sad now, even when we grieve, our mourning will turn to dancing. We light this third candle for the joy we know in Christ Jesus.

Lighting of the Third Advent Candle

(Sung to the tune of Away in a Manger - Hymn 194)

“Come, festively sing while awaiting the birth, join angels in dancing from heaven to earth. Wave banners of good news, lift high thankful praise. One candle is lit for the joy of these days.”

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Blessed Jesus, like John the Baptist we want to know if you are the Messiah.

You tell us to listen and to take notice of you in this world, and then, from experience, you talk about the kingdom of heaven. Open our eyes to see the lame walking, cures occurring, and hope rising in the kingdom that shall come, all as evidence of your presence among us.

God, your glory is made manifest by the strength you give us as your believing people.

Fear dissipates when you are near. Weak knees no longer tremble. We want to sing, and joy replaces doubt. We reach for you with our feeble hands, but it's your hand that holds us fast.

Holy Spirit, we need your counsel. We do not wait well. Like farmers waiting for crops

to ripen, we need to remember that your time and presence saturates all of our days, especially those in which nothing much seems to be happening. And then you make us bloom in due season

We remember, God, that you set the prisoners free, and gave justice to the wronged. Now you care for parent-less children and surviving spouses through us, your hands and heart and voice in a world that does not see loneliness as suffering. Be present through us as we attend to all in need.

As we name those whom we know have special needs for healing, remind us of our own need to be prayed for by the faithful.

Soon, Jesus, comes the Day of Christmas, your incarnation. Help us, like children, to feel the excitement and joy, for we are all children of the Heavenly Creator.

All the earth, seas, and heavens are yours, and we pray these prayers because you have promised to listen to us. Amen.

Hymn ***Hark! The Glad Sound*** **184**

Gospel Reading **Matthew 11:2-11 NRSV**

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see:

the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind?

What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces.

What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

This is the one about whom it is written, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Message *Joyful*

Unfulfilled expectations can be disappointing, can't they? When you plan and look forward to something for a long time, then when the time finally arrives and the reality is different

from what you expected, it can be a pretty big let down. Maybe it's a big vacation you've dreamed about for years, only to find that when you finally make it there, the reality was quite different from the brochures, or the weather did not cooperate whatsoever. But it's not just events that can let us down. People, especially our friends and family can cause us disappointment as well. Often we have expectations of people based on our own perspective, how we would handle something or react to situations, and when others react in a different way or take a different approach to something, we find ourselves let down and disappointed. I see it in my own family. Every family gathering there are always some who expect a certain uncle will be there on time for dinner, then they are disappointed and frustrated when he arrives late, even though he has rarely ever been on time for most things historically, and all those who get frustrated know that detail all too well.

After all, our expectations usually stem from our own perspective, how we understand things should work; how we would approach and react to any particular situation. The problem arises when we try to impose our interpretation of reality on others. In the case of my uncle, those who are frustrated and disappointed are trying to impose their expectations, how they would approach that situation, unrealistically on him and expecting the results to be how they would respond, not taking into account the reality of his perspective.

When I talk to couples in premarital counseling, I always advise that they need to have realistic expectations of their partners. They have to be happy with the facets of their personalities exactly as they are right now; to do differently would be to have unrealistic expectations and to set oneself up for disappointment.

In our gospel lesson this morning, John finds himself in that very situation. He has spent his whole life prophesying and preparing for what he expects will solve not only his problems, but those of his people. Like many of his contemporaries, he was expecting the Messiah to be a great deliverer, someone who would come to relieve the nation from oppression and restore the glory of old. And lo and behold, here comes Jesus to be baptized, who is ordained and blessed by a voice from on high. So John was thinking, this is it, he's here, great wrath will surely befall their oppressors and everything will be made right. Yet here he is, languishing for over a year in prison with no hope in sight. So he sends his disciples to interrogate this messiah to see if he's the real deal or is he just another prophet. He's having doubts. Surely this can't be it. Surely Jesus will round up a white horse to ride in and save the day. Yet when his disciples catch up to Jesus' teaching and preaching, he's obviously not on a majestic white steed, and not armed for battle against the Romans and Herod Antipas. He's healing and sharing good news with those who have none. Yet he is not offended by John's doubt. In fact he applauds him for his role as the one who prepares the way for him, elevating John above others, yet acknowledging that he, like all disciples, has growth ahead of him. John, while a great prophet, was also a human disciple.

Like us, his perception and expectations stemmed from his own understanding of how things should work. Like many Jewish men of his day, he had a deep knowledge of the book

of Isaiah. He knew the predictions in and out, and like many of his contemporaries, he expected a savior to arise fulfilling all of those promises, right here, right now. Jesus, too knew Isaiah like the back of his hand, and paraphrases Isaiah 35 and 61 in telling John's disciples that the "blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." Jesus is fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, just not in the manner that John and others expected.

John's expectations of Jesus did not meet the reality he experienced. He was frustrated, and felt left down. But that's something I'm sure we can all identify with. We know what that's like, when others don't meet our expectations, when things don't turn out as we plan or expect. We can doubt those we relied on to respond in a certain way, and we can doubt ourselves and the validity of our own perceptions. And like John, when we find ourselves languishing in this life, doubt can creep into our thoughts as well.

When we find ourselves beset with health issues, financial worries, sadness, grief or any number of things that make life a struggle, we can find ourselves questioning why is God allowing this, why aren't we being saved from our misery? Living in this liminal space "between times," we too face the same struggle as John in our story today.

It's an Advent struggle, it's a struggle of waiting and patience; a struggle of perspective. Many of us, like those of John's day, see the world around us appearing to get darker and darker, thinking things can't get any worse, surely Jesus is coming soon. Yet he doesn't come riding in on a white horse in our time either. It is what life is, in the "in between" of now, between the promise of Christmas and the promise of eternity.

The salvation Jesus brings is one of paradoxes: strength through weakness, prominence through humility, greatness by being meek. The Christ that comes at Christmas doesn't offer a way out of now, but a new way of being now. A way that doesn't depend on success or well-being in this world. A way that values those who suffer and struggle over those whose walk is privileged and easy. One that places value in others, and finds joy in caring and sharing that good news with others. One that finds joy in the knowledge that anything we suffer with in this world is a temporary inconvenience, that we will come out the other side whole. Jesus' followers discovered the joy in a simple life together, a life of fellowship and compassion, with love and witnessing to the joy of living in this world, but not of this world. Yet the joy of discipleship is by definition a difficult path.

As John discovered, walking a path in opposition to the ways of the world often leads to persecution. Speaking prophetic truth to power can land one in jail, or worse. To walk with Jesus is to take the good and the bad, the glory and good news of Christmas, with the shame and solitary suffering of Easter.

So this third Sunday of Advent we find ourselves waiting in the "in between" time: waiting for the promise of return and waiting to again celebrate the promise of arrival. It's a reflective time but also one of joy. Joy in the promise of a future renewal and joy in the arrival of what makes that promise possible. But that joy is not found in passive reflection.

The disciple's walk is an active one. We have a witness to give, a gospel to share. Our most effective witness is how we find joy in living a simple life of love, a life in contrast to the darkness around us. We show joy in being willing to give of ourselves for others, as our savior gave of himself for us.

Our Christian journeys should bring joy to our hearts, not be ones of burden, guilt or sorrow. During this next week of Advent, I would encourage you to reflect on what in your life of faith brings you joy, and how you can bring joy to others not only this week, but every week going forward.

As with the themes of hope and peace, we are called to live and share joy as well. I would encourage you to spend a some time in reflection and think of at least one way you can seek joy in your walk with Christ this week, and at least one way you can share and witness joy to someone else as well. As we journey into the week ahead, let's think how we can honor our commitment to our Creator to seek and share joy in the week ahead. Amen.

A Call to Serve

As recipients of the generosity of God, let us share the joy of that generosity with each other and the community.

A Time for Reflection - *Musical Interlude*

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

With these gifts, dear God, accept the praise and thanksgiving of our hearts, which rejoice in your goodness and love. Let these gifts point to your presence in the world, and further your hope for the world through Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us. *Amen.*

Hymn ***Joy to the World*** **318**

Benediction

Isaiah tells us that one day the wilderness will blossom with flowers; and the desert wasteland will come alive with new growth. And God's glory and splendor will be on full display.

With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands, and encourage those who have weak knees. Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, and do not fear, for your God is coming to save you."

So go with confidence into the days ahead. And may the love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, be among you and within you. Amen.