

## **"Joy"**

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Let's join our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, help us to know your divine joy that you offer humbly and freely through Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.**

Kent Crockett, in *I Once Was Blind but Now I Squint*, told of a man and wife who enjoyed playing a "Here's How I'd Remodel That House" game as they traveled. They would take turns picking out certain houses and explain how they would remodel them. One day as they were driving, they saw an old house that looked like it had been abandoned. The husband stopped in front of the house and said, "I tell you what I'd do with that shack. I'd bulldoze it down and start over."

At that moment, an elderly man stepped out of the house onto the front porch. With a big smile on his face, the old man waved at them as though they were long-lost friends. The couple waved back and then drove on down the road.

The husband said to his wife, "Do you think he would have been that friendly if he knew what I said about his house?" After a long pause the wife replied, "Probably so!" The most joyful people in the world are those who don't allow anything or anyone to steal their joy.

A big dog saw a young dog chasing its tail and asked, "Why are you chasing your tail?" The young dog responded, "I have mastered philosophy; I have solved the problems of the universe which no dog before me has rightly solved; I have learned that the best thing for a dog is joy, and that joy is in my tail. Therefore, I am chasing it; and when I catch it, I shall have joy."

The old dog said, "I too, have paid attention to the problems of the universe, and I too, have judged that joy is a fine thing for a dog, and that joy is in my tail. But I have noticed that when I chase after it, it keeps running away from me, but when I go about my business, it comes after me." The old dog had discovered that peace and joy are related. They're also both related to hope and love.

Today, John the Baptist testifies to the source of joy; the Light of Christ. John the Baptist was confronted by the priests and Levites sent by the Pharisees in

Jerusalem, asking, "Who are you? ... Are you Elijah?" The prophet Elijah, who I mentioned last week, was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind without dying and many expected his return as a harbinger of the messianic age.

John the Baptist says that he is not Elijah and says that he is not the Messiah. John the Baptist's purpose is to be a witness to the Light, to testify to the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist uses the same words that we read in Isaiah and in Mark last week: "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" The apostle John believes that John the Baptist is more than just a voice though, for he is a man sent by God; a messenger; a prophet who is not the Light, but was sent by God to testify to the Light so that all might believe through him. The religious authorities sent from Jerusalem didn't want to believe this message and they hassled John the Baptist about his identity and about his authority to baptize. Later, King Herod, in an oppressive act of power, has John the Baptist beheaded.

Writer C.W. Metcalf was working as a hospice volunteer when he met 13-year-old Chuck, who was terminally ill. One day Chuck gave Metcalf half-a-dozen sheets of paper with writing on both sides and said, "I want you to give this to my mom and dad after I die. It's a list of all the fun we had, all the times we laughed." Metcalf was amazed that this young boy on the verge of death was thinking about the well-being of others.

Metcalf delivered the list. Years later he decided to make a list of his own. Surprisingly, he found it difficult at first to compile his "joy list." But as he began looking each day for the moments of laughter, satisfaction, and joy, his list began to grow.

Can you look into your life and see the blessings that God has brought? You may want to make your own "joy list."

John the Baptist testifies to the Light that brings joy into our lives. The light referred to by John is the divine Light created by God on the first day of Creation as told in Genesis: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there

be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness." This is divine Light; the Light of the world. It wasn't until the fourth day that God created the sun and the moon and the stars to shine upon the earth.

Author Robert Fulghum tells this story of one of his professors, a wise man whose name was Alexander Papaderos. "At the last session on the last morning of a two-week seminar on Greek culture, Dr. Papaderos turned and made the ritual gesture: 'Are there any questions?' Quiet quilled the room. These two weeks had generated enough questions for a lifetime, but for now, there was only silence. 'No questions?' Papaderos swept the room with his eyes. So, I asked, 'Dr. Papaderos, what is the meaning of life?'

The usual laughter followed, and people stirred to go. Papaderos held up his hand and stilled the room and looked at me for a long time, asking with his eyes if I was serious and seeing from my eyes that I was. 'I will answer your question.'

Taking his wallet out of his hip pocket, he fished into a leather billfold and brought out a very small round mirror, about the size of a quarter. And what he said went something like this: 'When I was a small child, during the war, we were very poor and we lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. A German motorcycle had been wrecked in that place. I tried to find all the pieces and put them together, but it was not possible, so I kept only the largest piece. This one. And by scratching it on a stone, I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine: in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find. I kept the little mirror, and as I went about my growing up, I would take it out in idle moments and continue the challenge of the game.

As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was not just a child's game but a metaphor for what I might do with my life. I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of light. But the light is truth, understanding and knowledge, and it will only shine in many dark places if I reflect it.

I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have I can reflect light into the dark places of this world, into the dark places in the hearts of people and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of life.'

And then he took his small mirror and, holding it carefully, caught the bright rays of daylight streaming through the window and reflected them onto my face and onto my hands folded on the desk."

A little later in the gospel according to John, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." As his followers, we are to be like that little mirror, reflecting the Light of Christ into the dark places of the world. That is the meaning of the Christian life and in reflecting the Light of Christ, we bring divine joy to the lives of others and to our own lives. It's this divine joy that we seek on this third Sunday of Advent; the joy that comes with faith: the hope, peace, joy and love of God that is beyond our comprehension, yet is constantly at work in our lives. Thanks be to God. Amen.