

Third Sunday of Advent – Year B
December 13, 2020
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- SERMON -

This morning we lit three candles in our Advent wreath. Two weeks ago, we lit the first candle as a symbol of Hope. Last week we lit the second candle as a symbol of Love. This week we lit the third candle as a symbol of Christ who brings Joy.

Our emphasis today is on JOY.

This Christmas is a bit different than most of our past Christmases.

But let me suggest to you that this Christmas season can be a time of joy, no matter what your circumstances. Joy is like love – it’s not merely an emotion, but a decision. It’s all in where we choose to put our focus.

Let me suggest 3 places to focus our heart and mind this Christmas.

The word “JOY” is spelled J – O – Y.

I. Starting with the letter “J” – we FOCUS ON JESUS

In one of my favorite Christmas TV specials, Charlie Brown asks if anyone knows what Christmas is about, and Linus answered him. Can you guess what Linus said? He recites the story of Christ’s birth from Luke 2. HE knew Christmas is primarily about Jesus.

In Luke 23 it says, “An angel of the Lord appeared to them (*shepherds*), and the glory of the Lord shone around them (*the angels*), and they (*the shepherds*) were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great – JOY – for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior (*it doesn’t say “a baby”, but a Savior*) has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.’”

This good news will cause great JOY for ALL the people.

And remember when Mary visited her cousin, Elizabeth, who was six months pregnant with John (*who would become the baptizer*)? Elizabeth said, “But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for Joy.”

The Christ child hadn’t even been born yet, but His very presence in Mary’s womb brought Joy.

In John 1 this morning we read how John, the baptizer, acknowledged that his entire ministry was FOCUSED on Jesus. He explained, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'." And when 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."

There's a story of one year on a Christmas afternoon a visitor asked 5-year-old Ruth, "Did you get everything you wanted for Christmas?" After a moment's hesitation, she answered, "No, but then it's not my birthday!"

We focus on Jesus – and not just the birth of Jesus, but His entire life, and His death, and His resurrection. Our Savior, the Christ.

That should fill us with JOY!

II. Next is the letter "O" – as we FOCUS ON OTHERS.

When we focus on Jesus, it's only natural that we will then focus on OTHERS.

I love the O.T. reading this morning from Isaiah 61, where we read...

Isaiah 61:1-2

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;

FOCUSING on others...

And my goodness, I love how YOU do this.

This focus on others brings us joy, - doesn't it?

III. The last letter is "Y" – FOCUS ON YOURSELF

Yes, it is okay and a good thing to focus on YOURSELF.

We remember the verses in Matthew 22 when Jesus was asked which is the greatest commandment in the Law. Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with

all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Let’s focus a moment on the phrase “Love your neighbor as yourself.” So, how can we love our neighbor as ourself if we don’t love ourself? Does that mean, then, that it’s okay to love ME?

That’s an emphatic, YES!

If you don’t take care of you, you may not have the energy and strength, and frame of mind, to help others. So, yes, focus on yourself. Get the rest you need. Treat yourself once in a while. Set boundaries for yourself that help you TAKE CARE of you.

Sometimes we can get so busy helping and caring for others that we’re exhausted. I heard a phrase recently called “compassion fatigue”. Look it up.

In our N.T. reading this morning, Paul says -

I Thessalonians 5: 23-24

“May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.”

Philippians 4:6 – “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let YOUR requests be made known unto God.”

This morning we read 2 Thessalonians 2:16,17 – “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved US and by his grace gave US eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage YOUR hearts and strengthen YOU in every good deed and word.”

You have a gift this Christmas. It’s called JOY. We have this by focusing on Jesus, on Others, AND on ourselves. Don’t wait until December 25th to unwrap this gift. Open it now and enjoy it!

Amen.

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