

Advent 3
By Rev. Katrina Pekich-Bundy
Isaiah 52.7-10
Luke 1.46b-55
December 11, 2022

“It’s better to light a candle than curse the darkness.” This is a quote that is attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt, but it has been attributed to many others, as well, including cultural proverbs. The concept is fitting for Advent. Rather than stewing in the world as it is, perhaps we can do something to obtain the world as it should be. Advent is a time in which we stay awake and we acknowledge the injustices of the world, and then light a candle or two or four to not only shine a light on these injustices, but also consider the joy in the world. It doesn’t mean that there are times when we stew in the darkness first but then, eventually, we reach for the matches to bring light.

The darkness is not necessarily bad. In scripture, especially we pit light and dark against one another, but we need darkness. I love Barbara Brown Taylor’s book called *Walking in Darkness*. She writes about how we need the darkness for rest and for night creatures, and for all that cannot inhabit the day. Without darkness, we wouldn’t recognize the light. Pitting light and dark against one another is a binary that also forgets the dusk and dawn, and that there’s so much in between.

The third Sunday of Advent is always joy, and we always read the Magnificat, which is Mary’s song. God invites Mary to partner in salvation. She agrees and becomes pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Our passage today comes after these events, following Mary making a journey to see Elizabeth, her cousin. Elizabeth was married to Zechariah, a high priest. Elizabeth was older, and had not been able to conceive. God spoke to Zechariah in the temple and told him that Elizabeth would bear a child. Since Elizabeth was older Zechariah did not believe this, and told God as such, and so God silenced him for the remainder of her pregnancy.

Mary greeted Elizabeth with an embrace. Elizabeth will give birth to John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin. Mary called out to Elizabeth and when the baby in Elizabeth’s womb heard this voice it leapt in her womb. I love this passage because it is one of the few places that the Trinity is present: God is among them, the Spirit moves within John the Baptist, and Mary is pregnant with Jesus. When all three are present there is great rejoicing.

When Mary breaks in the glorious song, she rejoices. She says out loud that God has truly disrupted the rich and powerful and the oppressor. God could’ve chosen anyone to bear the Christ child and God chose this woman who had nothing but love and humility. God chose a woman that many wouldn’t believe.

Mary doesn’t falter in the passages we read about her. She is full of joy. We don’t hear about her doubt, but I wonder as the community most likely gossiped and talked about her if she questioned this call.

We have talked for the past few weeks about Christ, being born into the world and returning for salvation. I have suggested an alternate translation of salvation as release or liberation. Salvation is a liberation of the world as it is into the world as it should be. Mary is glad because God turns the powerful upside down lifting up the lowly. There is liberation for those who have been oppressed.

So on this third Sunday, what brings you joy? Author Zadie Smith wrote an essay, entitled “Joy.” She writes “Perhaps the first thing to say is that I experience at least a little pleasure every day.”¹ She finds joy in small things, and in large things. What she finds joy, like delicious food, she says other people find annoying, because to them the food is average or mediocre, but she is able to find specific joy in it.

I have known people like this. In fact, I’m reminded of someone I used to visit quite frequently who found delight in the smallest things. Every color was the best color. Every day was the best day. When she moved into a retirement home, she would tell me each time that the lemonade was the best lemonade she had ever had. Sometimes she would talk about something in which she found beauty and say, “I LOVE it! Don’t you just LOVE it?” And, often, I would love it. Had I not experienced that food or color or thing with her, I would have disregarded it, but her joy was contagious. She found joy in the present and staying awake, and in being aware.

For some joy can be difficult to find. This might be a difficult time of year because of experiences of loss or pain. There can be reminders at holidays of those loved ones that we miss or the life experiences that have turned out differently than we imagined. My favorite poet, Ross Gay, talks about how we often want to separate sorrow and joy. He describes joy and sorrow as being different rooms in a large house. Joy is up in the attic – a large, comfortable room with a door that locks and keeps out the sorrow that is hidden down in the basement corner. And that the sorrow often tries to seep into that room of joy.² They are “entangled.” Ross suggests that we find the joy by means of connecting with one another in the sorrow.³ Perhaps we find it together. Mary’s joy was not separate from sorrow in her life. As an unwed pregnant woman in that time there were many who would’ve looked down upon her. They would’ve questioned her story and questioned whether or not her son was the Christ child. She had joy within, but very few understood that joy.

We celebrate Mary as a bringer of joy. In Isaiah, we read about celebrating those messengers that bring us joy. What brings you joy this day? It might be something new job or a family member or it might be as common as a smile, or a kind note. You might be seeking joy and unable to find it in this time, and that’s OK. Sometimes we can rely on one another to find that joy or to hold us when we have lost our way.

As we continue through Advent, will remember that our joy comes in Emmanuel God with us. Our joy is in the hope that the world as it is, is not the end. We must stay awake and be

¹ Zadie Smith, “Joy”, https://gel.sites.uiowa.edu/sites/gel.sites.uiowa.edu/files/wysiwyg_uploads/zadie_smith_-_joy.pdf p. 329.

² Ross Gay, *Inciting Joy*, (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2022), 2-3.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

aware and live with intentionality. We must call out the injustices of the world and shine a light on them so that we can make change. And trust that there is joy within those moments. Amen