

**ST PAUL'S CHURCH (RONDEBOSCH)
SERMON (ADVENT 111—YEAR B)
SUNDAY 13 DECEMBER 2020**

READINGS: ISAIAH 61:12:2-6// PSALM 126// 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-24// JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28

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Open our ears Lord God and enable us to listen to your Word. Send your Holy Spirit to translate your Word and transform us into what you created us to be. Come O Lord and guide us in your paths AMEN

Joy to the world! The Lord has come
Let earth receive her King
Joy to the world! The Saviour reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods
Rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy

This is a well-known Christmas Carol that you will especially hear in Shopping Malls

Today the third Sunday of Advent traditionally has a focus on joy. *(It is sometimes referred to as Gaudette Sunday” a Catholic tradition--from the first word of the Introit hymn at Mass--- in the Latin original, Gaudete “Rejoice!” Even the colour of the vestments can be modified from penitential purple to a rose-pink colour and in some Anglican Churches the third candle in the Advent wreath is rose pink.*

Rejoice, the Lord is King!
your Lord and King adore;
mortals, give thanks, and sing,
and triumph evermore:
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

And joy seem to feature prominently in our readings. In our Old Testament reading from Isaiah we heard the words: ***I delight greatly in the Lord my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation***

The reading from Thessalonians had a similar joyful encouragement from the Apostle Paul: ***Be joyful always, pray continually give thanks in all circumstances.***

And in the Psalm which were sung by pilgrims as they made their way to the temple after it was rebuilt after the return from exile, as prophesied by Isaiah. ***The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy***

The Gospel is more low-key but there also we sense “a feeling of joyful expectancy as John testify about the coming of Jesus Christ who will be a light in this dark world In v7 we read ***“He came as a witness to testify concerning that light so that through him all men might believe”***

So what is joy?

The word joy comes from the Greek root word chara and means “to be exceedingly glad”. // A feeling of great pleasure and happiness//

But Joy is more than only happiness. Happiness is the feeling we have when everything is going well in our lives. So it is largely dependent on circumstances and maintained by events, by things, by experiences, often involving money and moods and materialism.

(we say I am so happy because I got a new car//new job)

Joy, on the other hand, is true contentment that comes from internal factors like our faith in the Lord. True joy is everlasting and not dependent upon circumstances.

Joy is a product of one’s faith and good relationship with God through Christ and this joy can endure even when our earthly circumstances change. It is that constant hopeful, peaceful, joyful state of mind – knowing that even when things here on earth are against us, God is for us – and by faith in Christ, we are firmly attached to Him.

Let us turn to our Scripture Readings

Isaiah 61 was a message to a broken and hurting people.

The prophet Isaiah is speaking to a discouraged people. It is right after the exile in Babylon and things are going very slowly forward as the people try to re-establish their life and faith in Jerusalem. *The opening words are very familiar to us because Jesus reads them in the synagogue in Nazareth when he begins his ministry (Luke 4).* But Isaiah speaks this **good news** to the broken-hearted people in Zion. They were still recovering from the conquest. The temple had not been restored to its former glory. There was still suffering and longing and wondering. Into this turmoil and waiting, the words of the prophet came like a burst of light and hope: ***“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news...” Good news.***

Allow me to tell you this good news/ bad news joke. There was a man and a doctor. The doctor says, “I have some good news and some bad news.” The man asks, “What is the good news?” “The good news is that the tests show that you have 24 hours to live,” the doctor replies. Astonished, the man asks, “How is that good news? What is the bad news?” To that, the doctor answers, “The bad news is that I forgot to tell you yesterday!”

Finally here is **Good News** for the Jews. And I imagine those words of hope were like the flickering light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. Have you ever had that moment where there was suddenly a light at the end of the tunnel when there hadn’t been one before? Sometimes even knowing that there is an end to the tunnel brings such relief. The good news the prophet was bringing was astounding: good news to the oppressed, binding up for the broken-hearted, liberty to captives, and release of prisoners. Justice, healing, and freedom were coming. The suffering would not go on forever. Because the Lord said ***I the Lord love justice. I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed***

The people can rejoice in the midst of their circumstances because the Lord will bring an end to their suffering – The Lord provides forgiveness and restoration—The Lord will bless them

My dear friends I know all of us are facing different circumstances (I have mentioned it last week and the week before) in our lives at this time which will generate different levels of happiness and joy and contentment among us. We are all dealing with the fear, uncertainty and challenges of COVID 19 now that we are experiencing a second wave -----and all of us are struggling. I was so shocked last week when I heard of the death of one of my fellow clerics Rev Ashley Petersen.

This year we will not be having our usual family Christmas dinners and celebrations because of social distancing we won't be able to visit our families or our families who usually come and visit us from other provinces and countries won't be able to come. Our maybe some of our family members have passed away. Some of us are unemployed we do not have money to even prepare a Christmas meal or buy presents for our children

In fact, there are countless other circumstances which can make this season anything but happy// anything but joyful. All of these circumstances can contribute to a feeling, which may be made worst by all the expected joy surrounding them.

My brothers and sisters the joy the prophet speaks of is not dependent on the immediate circumstances the people of Israel or any of us happen to find ourselves in

No, the joy the prophet speaks of is dependent on the broader perspective of God's activity and is grounded in his promises. God is the source of our joy. The joy the prophet is speaking of and which John is preaching about is this God who entered into our world as bring light to the darkness we are experiencing.

So no matter what your circumstances are don't lose your hope, don't lose your joy as we read in 1 Thessalonians 5 v 18 ***Be joyful always, pray continually give thanks in all circumstances***

But you know my brothers and sisters, many of us sitting here this morning are blessed and have enough And we are joyful and are experiencing that exceeding gladness, but there are many people in pain and in need who suffer. How do we use our power our influence and even out material wealth to reach out to those

in need? (the poor, the widows, the orphans and the lonely) How do we share that **Joy** with others?

In our Old Testament reading Isaiah says “***The Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor***”.

And in our Gospel reading we read “***There was a man who was sent from God his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light so that through him all men might believe***

CONCLUSION

My brothers and sisters we have to be witnesses to this LIGHT we have we have to proclaim GOOD NEWS to the lonely, the broken-hearted, the poor, the elderly the sick, and the less fortunate in our parish and in our community – and in this way bring JOY to others this Christmas

I am not saying we just have to give hand-outs to everybody----(There are a lot of you who already did and is still doing a lot to those in need. However let us reflect and see how we can share with those who are less fortunate than us so that we can spread this joy to others

Two weeks ago challenge each you to commit ourselves to reach out to one person or family or support one course and bring hope and joy. I hope you have identified such a person/family