

WE NEED JOY NOW, MORE THAN EVER

Matthew 2:7-12

December 15, 2019

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I think JOY is something that is sometimes misunderstood and sold short – yet, needed more than ever
The definition of JOY is “great pleasure, happiness or delight”
But for the Christian, it seems there ought to be more to it than that

JOY, by that classic definition could be something superficial and short lived
Like a fireworks show (for which Pittsburgh is so famous) that lasts a short time, is pretty
exciting, especially to the five year old covering his ears the whole time, and then, it's over
The excitement, or JOY if you will, is replaced by the headache of getting out of town along
with everyone else on the Veterans Bridge

Or you buy something you've been looking forward to getting, and it's a source of delight until it breaks
You know how it is... the long anticipated package arrives on your porch, you open it up, and
something is cracked or it's the wrong size and it has to go back
The JOY is temporary– Christian joy needs to be more, longer lasting
Or you get the job you've always wanted, you know, the one where you could do it better than
whoever held the position prior to you, and that's euphoric until you discover what it's
really like – the JOY doesn't last

For the Christian, JOY should be something enduring
Something on which the clock doesn't run out
Something that is present in the times of difficulty as well as in the times when all is well

I wanted to think of some times in my life when I've experienced JOY:
Graduations – times of feeling a sense of accomplishment; completing work to serve a lifetime
Wedding Day – to be married to the one I love, who I never thought would want to spend a
lifetime with me – to be accepted and valued for just who I am
The days on which our daughters and grandchildren were born – the JOY of new life with all its
potential and promise, the awesome responsibility of raising them to adulthood – that one is
joyful and scary at the same time and not every day was a good day in those formative
years
The joy of coming to know the reality of Jesus as I sat in a theater in Erie at the age of 12
watching a silent black and white movie, one of the first ever made, about the crucifixion
and resurrection of Christ
The joy of being added to the staff here at Ingomar Church when I retired – knowing that what I
have to offer is still valued
I even felt joy at my dad's funeral almost exactly a year ago
the joy of remembrance; the joy of the assurance of eternal life – the joy of knowing
that I would see my dad again, and be able to converse with him as I hadn't for many
months before
All of these things go beyond momentary or temporary happiness and they endure

JOY is experienced not in the accumulation of property, money, power or influence, but is most deeply

experienced in the times through which we can touch the lives of others.

I see the casino ads on television all the time – and everyone appears to be joyful

Someone just hit for big money – happy day!

But how many walked out of there with their wallets or bank accounts a lot lighter?

How many are struggling with the despair of addiction?

Where's the joy in all of that? Talk about something fleeting!

Well, if that's not where it's at – if that's not where JOY is to be found, where might we look?

Let's take a look at what Jesus has to say about it

In John 15 Jesus relays the parable of the vine and the branches

Jesus is the vine, the source of nourishment provided to the branches, which in turn, produce

I use to pick grapes after school in the vineyards of Erie County and the branches were very

prolific, because they drew their strength and ability to produce from the main vine

If a branch got broken and separated from the vine, it dried up

Jesus says, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.”

And at the conclusion of that parable, Jesus says, “These things I've spoken to you, that my JOY may be in you, and that your JOY may be full.”

So, we experience JOY when we, the branches, are attached to the life giving vine – Jesus, and when we produce

In the next chapter, John 16 Jesus acknowledges to his disciples that this life has its hardships and disappointments, that you may weep over the state of things while the world rejoices, but that sorrow will turn into JOY, and when Christ returns we will rejoice and no one will take that JOY away.

The JOY of Christ's return, which is a theme of this Advent season, reminds us that true JOY is in the final analysis, enduring and everlasting

The various epistles, or letters written by the apostle Paul and others also speak of finding JOY

Romans 5:11 - “We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation.”

One of the images of hell that most stands out to me is that it is a place of total isolation, separation from God – I can't think of anything further removed from JOY than that

Paul speaks here of being reconciled to God – our sins forgiven, forgotten about by God

You occasionally see someone on the news who was rescued by firefighters from a burning

building and how JOYFUL they are at being saved, maybe even having lost everything else

When you consider that we are in similar fashion saved by Jesus, not only for the present, but forever, that is a cause for JOY

1 Thessalonians 2:19 - “For what is our hope, our JOY, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?”

Apostle Paul is writing this letter to the Christians at the church in Thessolonica

He's telling them that they are a source of JOY in his life

A few weeks ago, I returned to one of the churches I served some years ago for the funeral of a member there

As I sat in the pew of that country church listening to the piano playing familiar hymns I thought to myself how much I love that church, what it's meant to me and to my family, how I still have a connection with it unique among the churches I was

pastor of over the years

And when I walk in here on Sunday mornings I feel that same uplifting JOY of being a part of the family of God in this place

Sure, you can be a Christian without going to church, but what you miss when you don't!

We are here to help, encourage, uplift and sometimes challenge one another

We're not in this alone, and that is something to rejoice in

Now here's one from James you may need to process a bit

James 1:2-3 - "Count it all JOY, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know the testing of your faith produces steadfastness."

Did you get that? "Count it JOY when you face trials (hardships, disappointments)"

The reasoning for that is that when you face and overcome those things you learn from them and grow in your faith and wisdom

Ever hear the Arabic saying, "All sunshine makes for a desert"?

We don't grow when we cruise through life

I know I don't want to face hardships, but it's been in such times that I have grown and my faith has become more deeply rooted

I don't rejoice in the challenges, but do rejoice in what God can bring out of them

And it's joyful to know we don't have to face those things alone

1 Peter 4:13 - "Rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed."

It's not as easy to be Christian today as it used to be even here in our nation

For the earlier times in my life, Christian values were pretty much the guiding influence for our society whereas today even the 10 Commandments are taken down

We read from the Bible and prayed the Lord's Prayer in school

We held baccalaureate services for graduates

High school football teams routinely prayed before games

Benedictions and invocations were offered at community events

"In God We Trust" became our national motto in 1956

The words, "under God" were added to our Pledge of Allegiance in 1954

But now, God, Christ, Christian teachings are widely rejected and when you exhibit those you are likely to face ridicule

I got one of those PA license plates that has the national motto, "In God We Trust" on it

It seems like I've been getting more harassment on the highway since I've had that on

Peter tells us to REJOICE when you share in the rejection Christ received so that you may

REJOICE when His glory is revealed

"Lord I want to be in that number, when the saints come marching in"

The songs of Christmas are filled with references to JOY

"Joy to the world, the Lord is come"

"Good Christian Friends, Rejoice in heart and mind and voice... Christ is born today"

"O come all ye faithful, JOYFUL and triumphant"

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing... Joyful all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies"

"Glo.....ri...a"

The shepherds outside Bethlehem experienced joy when the angelic chorus announced Jesus' birth

The Wise Men found joy in the appearance of the Star of Bethlehem

Mary and Joseph rejoiced in the birth of Jesus despite the humble setting they found themselves in

Simeon and Anna joyfully celebrated Jesus' dedication at the Temple 8 days after his birth

And many others found JOY through Jesus' teachings, healings and miracles over his ministry

And today, this Advent season, we can find that JOY as well, so....

I'd leave you with this thought today – a little “bumper sticker theology”:

J = Jesus first O = others next Y = yourself third

It's through obedience, giving and serving that we discover the JOY God intends for our lives,
something we need now, more than ever.