

## Pastor Roy's Sermon from December 13, 2015

When was the last time you sang and shouted for joy? What makes you sing and shout for joy? What might make you sing and shout for joy? Or if not shouting for joy, since that is only really acceptable in sports and concerts, what about a great gladness? (Joy is great gladness!) **What makes you glad?** Winning the lottery? Learning that your child is happy and well? Or that a friend who has been struggling with depression has been doing well for the past year? Hearing that you or a family member or friend is cancer free? Reduction of carbon pollution? Peace between conflicted peoples? Or simply looking at and listening to creation and being amazed at the life God has created?

What fills you with joy? Are you joyous now? Is joy, this great gladness, something for which you hope and dream and pray?

Where does Joy come from? Is gladness something we feel or is it more solid than that?

Might it be more a foundation than something that happens to us? See the difference? Does joy make us happy. . . ? or does it give us courage? After all, we can be filled with courage without feeling happy. We can be filled with resolve to act in love without bubbling over with glee. Right? Is this what the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of Advent is about with its rose candle?

Joy doesn't depend on my having a good day. Joy flows from God, like rain from clouds, and warmth from the sun. No matter what we do or fail to do, how good or bad our lives are, joy comes from God as life comes from God. Joy is embedded in God's life giving and sustaining nature. Nothing, nobody, can take it away. This source of life will always be.

Another way to think of joy is that we are part of something much, much bigger, and more alive, than ourselves. God's life sustaining power is in the universe, and there is joy.

If this is not true for you, dig deeper. Search hard! Don't give up! As Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock, and the door will be opened to you." The reign of God is a reign of true joy. The gospel proclaimed is courage to live faithfully.

And so joy is always within us and around us. But it takes discipline to live into it. The courage is there, but if we do not seize it, joy will elude us. If we do not cultivate this foundation of life, we will suffer.

Mindfulness of joy is key! We must make decisions based on the foundation of gladness. We must choose to act with courage. Courage to love. Courage to trust. Courage to choose health. Courage to focus on the positive. Courage to share, to give.

Joy sets us free to work for the liberation of our neighbor, to work for the polar bear, and the poor peoples who live close to the ocean and its rising tides or on the edge of the African Sahara desert which continues to grow. To work on behalf of our neighbors who need help? To serve the least, the most lonely. . .because joy gives us hope?

Hear the words of the apostle Paul, once more: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen. Thanks be to God.