

“Finding, Following, and Forwarding My Joy”
Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Season of Advent, Joy Sunday, December 13, 2015
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Holy Scriptures: Isaiah 12

Sermon

“Hello” By: Adele

*Hello, it's me
I was wondering if after all these years you'd like to meet
To go over everything
They say that time's supposed to heal ya
But I ain't done much healing*

*Hello, can you hear me
I'm in California dreaming about who we used to be
When we were younger and free
I've forgotten how it felt before the world fell at our feet*

*There's such a difference between us
And a million miles*

Adele is an amazing singer
who uses her voice to help you feel what she feels;
she is also a remarkable poet
whose lyrics connect with the human condition.

Poets break and enter into our hearts
with words and sighs, with language and images that touch
us,
intimately, personally, communally,
and we are never the same again.

Poetry dares to move beyond rational thought
and avoids the pitfalls of ideas that can be explained and
thus explained away.

Throughout the Holy Scriptures
those who testify or proclaim, who whisper or shout their
faith
may choose to do so with poetry and song,
with creative writing and speaking and singing
that goes beyond cognitive thinking
and sneaks in the side door to find your soul.

Consider some of the poetry in the Holy Scriptures
as expressed by our faithful forbearers:

The Nativity Story as told in the Gospel of Luke is one poem
after another.

Mary in her Magnificat sings a hymn of thanksgiving:

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.*

So too does Zachariah:

*“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed
them.
He has raised up a mighty savior for us
in the house of his servant David...”*

The Angels join in to sing in poetry from Beyond, bringing to
us the Word in song:

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”*

Even Simeon, picking up the Holy Child Jesus in the Temple,
sings with his last breaths:

*“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation...”*

I don't need to remind you that Mother Mary's song known
as the Magnificat
is based on the sonnet of Hannah in the book of Samuel.

And so moved was the Apostle Paul by his love for God
that in the second chapter of Philippians
he included one of the earliest known hymns
which he quoted – or sang! –
and it's poetic verses and everlasting theology
have touched millions of souls.

Just don't get me started on the poetry and songs that Moses
offers in Exodus 15,
or the prophet Amos who sings in the Fourth, Fifth and
Ninth Chapters,
or the Psalms and the Song of Solomon.
All these and more are offered by people like you and me,
wrestling with life and their relationships with God and
neighbor and nations.

Speaking of Prophets, listen to Isaiah 12 as a poem,
an ancient prose
that serves as a bridge between the life and times
of Isaiah 1-11 and Isaiah 13-39.
Verses 1, 2, and 3 are written in personal pronouns,
while verses 4, 5, and 6 are expressed in plural pronouns.

Throughout the listener gains an overwhelming sensation of the extravagant, unlimited, everlasting divine source of what was once so scarce!

The Lord provides a precious commodity that humans lost yet found
whenever God supplied an overabundance of whatever is needed,
be it water, bread, strength, healing, community, hope, and joy!

Hear again Isaiah 12:

First the Personal Pronouns, a blessed word to the individual follower:

You will say in that day:

*I will give thanks to you, O Lord,
for though you were angry with me,
your anger turned away,
and you comforted me.*

*Surely God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid,
for the Lord God is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.*

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

Now the Plural Pronouns, a blessed word to the faith community:

And you will say in that day:

Give thanks to the Lord,

*call on his name;
make known his deeds among the nations;
proclaim that his name is exalted.*

*Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously;
let this be known in all the earth.*

*Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.*

Finding My Joy

Joy is an unlimited gift of God;
so why does it feel like joy is in such short supply?
The Prophet Isaiah said, *“With joy you will draw water
from the wells of salvation.”*
To a people who thirst, whether for justice or righteousness
or a cup of cold water,
Isaiah encourages us to draw deep, to drink deeply from our
wells.

Please note that there is not just one well;
drink from the many wells of salvation God provides.
And we are to do so with joy!
We have joy because the Living Water of Christ
is self-sustaining and satisfies.
We can draw as deeply and as often as we like
because the wells of salvation have plenty for everyone.

This is not a zero sum game, with a loss for every gain;
this is not like a pie with only so many pieces;
this is not like a line drawn in the sand
that says God will provide and love you only so far and no
farther.

The everlasting extravagance of God’s love

is something you take with you everywhere, every moment of every day.

God's extravagance sings of a holy relationship that is dynamic,
rather than static or stale or small;
such extravagance is a blessed assurance
that God is slow to anger and quick to forgive.

Again we ask if Joy is an unlimited gift of God,
why does it feel like joy is in such short supply?

Stevie Wonder sings, "*Love is in need of love today.*"
So, too, is joy.

If your joy in life and love has gone by the wayside,
where must you return to rediscover your joy?

Remember that summer day when a woman and her
grandson were at the lake?

He was playing in the water when all of a sudden
a huge wave appeared from nowhere
and crashed directly over the spot where he
was wading.

When the water receded he was nowhere to be found.
She lifted her hands to the sky and cried, "*Lord, how could you?*"

*Aren't you proud of me? Have I not been a wonderful
mother and
grandmother? Have I not given to my church and bought
Girl Scout cookies?"*

A few minutes later another huge wave crashed on the beach.

As the water receded, the boy was standing there,
smiling, splashing around as if nothing had ever
happened.

A loud voice boomed from the heavens,
"I have returned your grandson. Are you satisfied? Are you filled with joy?" She looked down at her grandson
then she looked up and said, *"He had a hat!"*

Joy is as much an attitude as an attribute.
Consider the poem: *"Two men were behind bars. One saw mud; the other stars."*

Where do you set your sights?

Let's be honest and authentic here.
The greatest enemy of Joy is Fear.
The greatest friend of Joy is Faith.
My friends, it is virtually impossible to be afraid and happy,
to be grumpy and grateful.

Faith and Fear are catching; they are contagious!
And yet Fear has gripped us personally and as a people.
What do we have to fear?
Disagreement? Loss? Rejection?
Do we fear other people?
Are we afraid of people we do not know yet
and have yet to make friends,
people who are strangers today yet may be neighbors
tomorrow?
Do we fear scarcity?
Are we besieged by a sense of a lack of enough?

The truth is that Fear is often based on our sense of scarcity.
I need 20% more;
I am entitled to whatever I can get my hands on;
I need more for me and mine;
I need to pull up the drawbridge after I am across,
lest someone follow me here and take what I think I need
(more than they do).

Each moment we allow Fear to dominate and overcome,
it covers up the Joy that God has planted deep within us

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The very things that really matter to God there is no scarcity
of, folks.

In God's world there is no scarcity of love,
no lack of forgiveness, no diminishment of relationships.
God wills for faith communities to practice healing and hope
and hospitality.

God says to you and me, *"With joy you shall draw water
from the wells of salvation."*

This well never runs dry;
it washes clean and refreshes and rejuvenates.

God delights in returning to you your joy that once was lost,
dropped by the wayside.

In the holy name of Jesus
your joy has been found and returned to you,
right now, this very moment, here,
here in the House of the Lord of an Extravagant Joy.

Following My Joy

Where do you journey to live into your joy?

Herbert Kretzmer, who grew up in Kroonstad, a small town
south of Johannesburg,

which had "one school, one movie house, and a
hundred Jewish families,"

learned to love "the lilt and lurch of popular
song" from the movies.

His earliest memory is a South African servant
singing as she scrubbed,

with the sun burning through the Basotho
blanket

that held him on her back.[\[1\]](#)

The original French version of “Les Misérables”

included a patriotic call to arms,

“À la Volonté du Peuple” (“At the Will of the
People”).

Kretzmer said, “I didn’t like the idea of ‘at the will of the
people’

—it made it political, it lacked passion.”

Instead, he used song itself as the central metaphor:

“Do you hear the people sing?

Singing a song of angry men?

It is the music of a people

Who will not be slaves again!”

Listen to the song of a people, the poetry of grace,
the dance music that God offers and provides to you.

Emma Goldstein said: *“If I can’t dance to the music of your
revolution,*

I don’t want to be a part of it.”

Dance to the music of God’s revolutionary, radical love.

Follow your joy by allowing it to bubble up and overflow into
your daily, workaday life.

Forwarding My Joy

To whom are you called to forward your joy?

Go forth rejoicing! Pay it forward! Pass it on!

Your song of gratitude is catching; your living, breathing
poem of joy is contagious.

The greatest enemy of Joy is Fear; the greatest friend of Joy
is Faith.

My friends, it is virtually impossible to be afraid and happy,

to be grumpy and grateful.

If you are happy you won't be afraid! If you are grateful, you won't be grumpy!

Nine years ago my family went to Disney World soon after I completed a Doctor of Ministry Degree.

I went into every single Disney store looking for a t-shirt that showed a Dwarf named Doc.

Guess what I found instead: a million drab t-shirts that said, "Grumpy."

Okay, so Grumpy is a top seller in the Magic Kingdom.

The Good News is that in the Kingdom of God, the top seller is Joy.

There might be a song in there somewhere.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen!

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Communion Meditation

Mother Teresa wrote on her wall:

"People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered.

Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind,

people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.

Be kind anyway.

If you are successful,

you will win some unfaithful friends

and some genuine enemies.

Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and sincere

people may deceive you.

*Be honest and sincere anyway.
What you spend years creating,
others could destroy overnight.
Create anyway.
If you find serenity and happiness,
some may be jealous.
Be happy anyway.
The good you do today,
will often be forgotten.
Do good anyway.
Give the best you have,
and it will never be enough.
Give your best anyway.
In the final analysis,
it is between you and God.
It was never between you and them anyway.”
Hold true to your Joy in Jesus Christ.
And trust that Jesus is holding true to you.*

[\[1\]](#) "Songs of Angry Men" BY JOHN LAHR; New Yorker Magazine, February 25, 2013
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