

## **Sermon: God comes to bring you home December 15<sup>th</sup> 2024 JOY!**

**Prayer:** God of hope and peace stir up deep within us the joy of celebrating the birth of Christ. May joy, peace and hope that are beyond human understanding keep us united in your love? Amen

Today's message is on the theme of joy! What gives you joy? What takes away our joy? What suppresses our joy?

**Introduction:** The prophet Zephaniah sings a song of Joy. He pronounces judgement on the people because they chose evil. He says; "God will do thorough house cleansing." His main message is God's restoration of all humanity. God is in your midst. God is with you! God the Mighty One will save you today and in the future. The Lord rejoices over His people with gladness and joy! He tells his audience that "**God comes to bring you home.**" This is the Good News we celebrate with joy! The Holy One who is healing and saving lives.

As a child I sang the song: I've got the joy, joy, joy down in my heart.

It is the time of the year when we pull out our ornaments for Christmas. It is the time when we do thorough house cleansing. We rearrange furniture to make space for our decorations. It is the time we gather our favourite ornaments and hang them on the tree. Some people have family traditions for decorating the Christmas tree. Most people purchased their ornaments. However, some families have a few of their cherished home-made Christmas treasures.

Each ornament holds special memories. These are ornaments that were given to you from your children or grand-children. They were made by friends or family members from far or near. Some people collect Christmas ornaments from different countries that remind them of the cities/places and the wonderful time they had there. Each family holds traditions of Christmas close to their heart. It is the season to reminisce and tell the stories of joy as well as the challenging times.

Ken and I started a tradition of collecting magnets for my refrigerator. Each magnet reminds me of the city I traveled and the wonderful time Ken and I shared on our journey. Also, I collected some Christmas ornaments. As you unpacked those ornaments you have mixed emotions-some of them will make you laugh and some will bring tears to your eyes. Some old Christmas cards or letters will stir those emotions too. You will have tears not because your ornament has grown old or cracked or broken or worn out but because something in you experienced a broken emotion.

Your heart is broken because a family member is gone and the season will never be the same again. Something in us is broken. Something we cannot explain but can feel down in the gut. We love and cherish the memory but it cannot be fixed. Somehow in the complexity

of roller-coaster emotions you gain strength to smile. Perhaps let out laughter and even with a tear or two you eventually find joy deep in your heart.

Advent speaks of who God is and whose we are. God understands the mixed emotions. God lovingly creates each one of us even the ones we do not like or cannot trust. God is the potter and we are the clay shaped and designed by God. God understands our fragility and gives us the strength to celebrate life. We are here on earth for God's purpose. Advent reminds us that because we are broken God sends Jesus for the healing of the world. Some things we cannot fix on our own. We need the spiritual power of God's grace and love. God comes to bring us home with gladness and joy.

**The prophet Isaiah prays: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down...." 64:1.** God is in your midst. God is with you! God the Mighty One will save you today and in the future.

What is broken in our community and world-environmental concerns, violence, war, economic depression, addictions, unemployment, hunger, safe place for people to take refuge, clean water for developing countries, eradication of poverty etc.? Advent is season of personal and communal repentance. It is a time of healing for all of creation. The One who creates and recreates is the Mighty One who brings us home and makes us whole again.

A long time ago, Jesus was born in a little town called Nazareth. Jesus' ministry began with restoration for humanity. Healing is not complete as yet. Healing continues here in this small space among God's people gather for prayer and worship. Healing is happening in every place and time. We gather together and offer prayers for what is broken in our daily actions. What is broken in our emotional life? What is broken in our world?

We are praying for families torn by anger and bitterness, greed and pride. We pray for people who are struggling with addictions. We are praying for the protection of children. We are praying for those who have food insecurities. We are praying for those who grieve the loss of their loved ones. We are praying for those whose joy is suppressed because of fear and challenging times. Joy is an emotion we express with words and actions. We pray for joy. We sing with joy. We do the work of Christ with joy. We know there is much brokenness in small communities and our world.

Jesus did not remain broken on the cross. Through the resurrection power of God's love the whole of creation is healing. God offers this same love to make you whole. God comes to bring us home where we belong in community with one another. Each time we gather for worship we are spreading the joy of knowing Jesus Christ.

Someone asked the preacher: In the olden days they were people who saw the face of God. Why don't they anymore? The preacher replied; because nowadays no one can stoop that low. *"And the Word became flesh and dwell among humanity."* Joy has come to the world. Joy lives in our hearts.

In becoming human, God sided with the oppressed and the outcasts, and showed it by coming first to poor, lowly, and even despised people. God is with people seeking refuge and a place to call home.

God becoming human in lowly places is beyond our understanding. It means that God knows you and loves you. Come home for the holidays even it means to sleep on a fold-out couch in a house full of extended family and with the odd cousin. There is joy with family.

Those who grew up in the north look for snow- flakes, mistletoe, plum pudding, short bread, turkey dinners, reindeer etc. Those who are from the Caribbean, Africa or Asia look for pepper-pot, rum cake, homemade bread, spiced sorrel drink, garlic pork etc.

There are many unique things that create mixed emotions whether it is Marg's cookies or Louise favourite baked goodies, Andy's special drink punch, or Adelle's short ribs roast. We imagine the aroma of baked goodies, the pallet juices flowing and you are coming home. You dance with joy, reaching out and inviting others to share the joy. You sing; "Joy to the world has come among you!" Joy is unwrapped, no longer in a baby crib but **lies in the heart**. Rejoice, Again I say rejoice!

God is here!

**This is home! Amen**

**Prayers for the people December 15<sup>th</sup> Request for prayers.**

**God of restoration hear us.**

Creator of heaven and earth, of seas and rivers of valleys and plains, we magnify and sanctify your holy name. We rejoice every day in you for the gift of life, health and strength.

You have placed us in a world filled with wonders, as we wait for signs of your promised reign; help us to stay awake, to prepare our hearts for your coming. **God of restoration hear us.**

God of mercy, light and life, hope for the future and memory of all that have gone before us. Help us to rejoice every day in you our God and Saviour. We give thanks for the promise to fill the hungry with good things to open the eyes of those who refuse to see. Help us to seek

for answers to challenging situations and be willing to engage new possibilities. **God of restoration hear us.**

We give thanks for the promise hidden in bare branches that will sprout forth new growth in spring. We give thanks for simple pleasures each day of hats, and mittens and scarves of warm cots and warm rooms, for friends that celebrate with us in our joys, and comfort us when we are hurt and feel broken or sad. **God of restoration hear us.**

We pray for immigrants and migrants who hope for a better life for themselves and their children. We pray for healing for the imprisoned. We pray for all whose lives are marked by poverty and need, for those who are sick or in pain, those who suffer with addiction, those broken in spirit and mind. Grant us healing and strength to make good choices.

**God of restoration hear us.**

God of healing have mercy upon our families and friends and those yet to come to know you as Saviour. We bring to you our prayers, petitions and intercession, whether spoken or in the silence of our heart. Hear us compassionate God. You taught us to pray together: Our Father

Rev. Margaret MacDonald