

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



December 12, 2021

JOY

something better than happy

by Drew Downs

When we speak of joy, it is easy to think of it as the same as being happy. Something that just explodes out of us, bringing a seasonal festiveness out of us. But when we're not feeling that way, we think maybe there's something wrong with us.

It sometimes seems as if happy is the default expectation for being in our world. Like we must always *be* happy. As if other emotions, when present, are unwelcome.

I have come to see joy as an antidote to this kind of dogmatic thinking.

Joy, like anger, sadness, worry, or disgust, is a sensation. So it is fleeting. But it is also something we can cultivate.

This time of year, I strive to focus *less* on what I'm *not*. Instead, I strive to be open to God's presence, anticipating it, and finding joy wherever it is discovered.

ADVENT

Winter 2021

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

A couple weeks ago, I shared the challenge I have with keeping the liturgical calendar primary. It may seem like such a silly thing to some, but it is a way that I keep my attention, not on the world as a timeless and predictably rigid place, but as God's creation.

This week, I want to share some of the ways I keep the church calendar first. And it really begins with shifting the particular stuff we take for granted about our **calendared** lives.

First is in the calendar itself. I've started using a journal called Sacred Ordinary Days. Rather than break the year into months, it is ordered by liturgical seasons. Each one is marked with time for reflection and planning. It is a beautiful journal and serves well to focus the mind and heart around the shape of the seasons.

The other thing I do is to celebrate Advent 1 like it is New Year's Day. I make a show of it and hype it like New Year's in good fun, but I always do it with the intention of reminding you *and myself* that we have begun a new year together. And all the things we do at New Year's, including resolutions and reflections become quite appropriate to the moment.

As we rejoice this week in hope and peace at the advent of our Lord, let us consider the new beginnings, the opportune changes, the dreams that are being fulfilled. And let us name all these lovely could-bes as anticipations of new joy in this new year.

Drew

ADVENT

Winter 2021

FOR SUNDAY

The Third Sunday of Advent

December 12, 2021

Collect

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Luke 3:7-18

"Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."

Reflection

Luke describes the message that John the Baptizer brings to the people as "Good News". We are conditioned in the church to know that "Good News" stands for the gospel even when it doesn't seem objectively good. Or even appealing. We know that the Good News of Jesus may not sound like the kind of good news we get from our neighbors.

But this distinction makes it too easy to ignore what actually *is* good about the news that John brings.

ORDINARY TIME 2021

I'm really struck by this line from the reading about Abraham. We can guess what it is responding to. That sense of entitlement and privilege with which we are all familiar. The kind that drives one to say "Don't you know who I am?" or "But I'm the customer! Be nice to me!"

There's something about this moment that is both frightening and liberating. John is telling a bunch of people "Hey, some of you are insiders. But don't think being *born* an insider is a golden ticket. God can let *anyone* (or *anything*) in."

We must consider how this might apply to us, too!

I can't help but notice the parallels with our own explorations of racial reconciliation and healing. That the burden of the present is to not only *deal* with the past, but reconcile with it now *for* the future. Because if **we** aren't up to that task, *someone else will be*.

John drives them to *not* rely on their lineage or power to define their relationship with God. But instead, they must *act* like children of God. The impact of this is *huge*. It is also easy to ignore.

Because the drive to be satisfied by identity is strong. And because sometimes we're afraid of what acting *does to our identity*. And yet, the need for us to not only move *past* our problems, but *engage* them is **also** strong.

This is what makes the good news so tough. And yet it's still *good*. It invites us into a new pattern of life that is thoughtful, generous, and equitable. And one that is willing to be better than the stuff we're made of.

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