



ADVENT

hope peace joy love light

JOY

Sunday 5 December 2021

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

I know I've just expressed it all already but it is really just such a privilege to be able to share with you all and what better series to do it in, than an Advent one! I was sharing with our youth a couple of weeks ago about how we do so many different things in the lead up to Christmas which help to build a sense of excitement and anticipation of what's to come. As the song goes, we quite literally "deck the halls". The shops, our streets, our homes, our lives get saturated with Christmas. I'd even say a big part of the excitement of Christmas comes from the lead up because it helps us to actually know what to anticipate. So, so far this advent series, we have been challenged to reflect as we 'deck the halls' and prepare for Christmas: are we really building excitement and anticipation about the real good thing that's coming, Jesus.

We have learnt that we call this time leading up to Christmas where we prepare our hearts and create that sense of anticipation and excitement, Advent which means arrival. And we call this time advent, 'arrival' because it represented the waiting and celebrating the arrival of Jesus to be born in the world as an infant on Christmas Day.

But our question has been: why do we still participate in advent? Why would we still build a sense of excitement and anticipation of an arrival that already happened over 2000 years ago? Why is the birth of Jesus worth celebrating at all?

When we go through Advent we reflect on how Jesus' arrival brings us hope, peace, joy, love, and light. The Bible tells us Jesus brought all these things with His birth, and we get to experience them now when we are in relationship with Him. But we also are still living in a broken world. We don't experience hope, peace, joy, love and His light in their fullness. But Jesus has promised that He will come again and when He does, these things will be made

complete.

Advent is all about celebrating what Jesus has given us – but also realising that things won't be perfect until He arrives again. We are still waiting and anticipating His arrival, mirroring the way they were before His birth.

At church the last couple of Sundays, we have been looking at some passages in Isaiah which show us what exactly it was the people were anticipating and what it is that we get to partially experience now and get to anticipate in fullness to come.

So, together, let's read Isaiah 52:8-10. It says:

*Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices;
together they shout for joy.
When the Lord returns to Zion,
they will see it with their own eyes.
Burst into songs of joy together,
you ruins of Jerusalem,
for the Lord has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
The Lord will lay bare his holy arm
in the sight of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth will see
the salvation of our God.*

So, so far this series, Scott has shared about how Jesus is our hope and on the peace we find in Him; and so I have the privilege of sharing today about Joy.

At first I thought, "Woohoo! What an exciting, fun, joy-filled thing to get to preach on!" But then very quickly I found myself actually saying, "But wait... What actually is joy?" This passage says, "*they shout for joy*" and joy is something we talk a lot about as Christians but what actually is it?

I found myself saying things like, "I know because of Jesus and what He has done that there is more and so I can have joy... or, is that hope? Or it doesn't matter what my circumstances are, what's going on in life, because I have Jesus with me, because I know what He has done and will do, I can have joy... Or, hang on, is that peace?" Have you guys had any similar thoughts? I have found it so hard to untangle them from one another and the more I thought about it the harder and harder I found it was to put my finger on what 'joy' actually is. So before we ask the questions of how we can experience more joy or how we can bring Jesus' joy to people this Christmas, I want to start there. I want to start with the surprisingly difficult question: what even is joy?

What is joy?

Joy is a super common word, and Christians are not the only ones who use it. So, being the Youth Pastor I am, I thought, "What better place to turn than Instagram with all its wisdom and inspiration, to try get an idea of what we - or at least society, today - actually mean when we say 'joy'."

Let me share with you some material I found:

- There is this Instagram worthy definition: "Joy is an emotion evoked by well being, success or good fortune, a state of happiness or felicity."
- And, who likes the movie 'Inside Out'? Where better to look than the character called Joy! She says, "Joy is finding happiness in everything!"
- Or this good one: "Find a place inside where there's joy and joy will burn out the pain."

I guess this is our culture saying that joy is an emotion, an emotion that it is similar to happiness. That when there is joy we won't feel sadness or pain. That's what the world says, but I think the Bible and Jesus offers a slightly different understanding of joy.

In fact I read in the Bible that there is a time for everything: a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. And we see this in some key stories throughout the Bible. Some of you may know the story of Paul and Silas in prison from Acts chapter 16. Essentially, Paul and Silas were beaten by a crowd before being thrown in prison because they were doing stuff for God. Paul and Silas were obviously not happy about this, yet they still experienced joy.

Another example is in Jesus. Even Jesus Himself is described as weeping before being taken to the cross. He was clearly not happy.

So it is obvious that joy can't just be an emotion. We can't experience happiness and sadness at the same time. We can't be both pleased and frustrated. And yet the Bible seems to say that we can be sad and still joyful, we can experience pain and still be joyful. So then if joy isn't an emotion... what is it?

Instagram offers this:

- "Joy is sparked in our morning coffee, music, time with friends, a soothing breeze" - how nice does that sound!
- Or "Joy is what happens when we allow ourselves to recognise how good things really are."

We've all heard that before, right? That we will find joy when we look for the little bits of good, or are grateful for the bit of good in our life. Even if there is a lot of bad going on, we can find the little glimpses of good stuff and focus on them.

But when I think back to the story of Paul and Silas in jail, beaten with rods, chained up and thinking they are going to die, it doesn't explicitly say, but I imagine they would have had a hard time making a list of little good things around them to be thankful for.

And Jesus is literally about to walk to be crucified. Being crucified was renowned as being a slow and painful form of torture and death, it's even why we now have the term 'excruciating' - Jesus was knowingly going to that and we don't see Him saying, "But my joy is in this soothing breeze." We see Him weep, we see Him cry out to the Father and ask, "If it's possible for this not to happen, then please let it not happen..." To me, it doesn't look like Jesus is looking around Him trying to find good parts of His circumstance to focus on.

In fact I think these people would all look around and say, "You know what? These circumstances are pretty terrible. There aren't too many things that are nice and enjoyable to spark joy." And yet, they have joy! So if joy is not an emotion and it is not based on our circumstances... what is it?

Back to Instagram. Instagram also offers these little bits of advice:

- "Find out what gives you joy and do it."
- "Make joy your compass today!" - Cute!
- Or this one: "If you're not having a good time, find something else that brings you joy in life and pursue that!"

So if joy isn't just an emotion and isn't about our circumstances, maybe like Instagram is saying: it's something we pursue, we make it our compass, we throw out things that don't spark joy, as Marie Kondo would say.

But what I actually see in the Bible is God leading people into suffering as part of His plan. Paul and Silas were following God, proclaiming the gospel and doing miracles in His name, as God was asking them - which is what led them into their suffering. And we know Jesus was absolutely following the Father's voice as He was led into His suffering.

What I see is that their joy was in having a different perspective, a kingdom perspective. Joy for them wasn't about their circumstances; in fact, they were willingly led into suffering because they saw beyond their current circumstances and saw, believed, and held onto the promises of God. In another passage, the cross Jesus is being led to is described as "the joy set before Him", not because He was going to find joy in the act of being on the cross itself, but because Jesus had a bigger kingdom perspective - He saw beyond His circumstance - and in that He had joy.

We started by talking about Isaiah, he understood this too. Israel was in exile and Isaiah is casting their eyes beyond their current circumstances, casting their eyes onto the coming messiah: Jesus. Helping them to focus on and believe the promises God had given them so

that they may find their joy in Jesus.

How can I experience (more) joy?

So, that's all very well then, our joy is about having a different perspective and casting our eyes beyond our circumstances to the promises of God. But how can I actually have it? We all want to be experiencing joy in our day to day lives, and we know we can, so how do we cultivate joy? How do we grow our joy?

One final Instagram slide. Probably the most popular one of all: "Choose joy."

Who has seen or posted this before? Is this the answer? Is that what Paul and Silas and Jesus were doing? Is this what it all comes down to? A choice - it's not about our circumstances, it is about you - choose joy.

I've got a little demonstration for you:

I'm going to light this candle. This candle is going to represent the hard times, going through the fire, the pressures of life.

And here I have my 'joy' - in the form of a balloon.

As I blow up the balloon, I'm going to choose joy.

I'm going to put effort in with every breath, I'm not being passive, I'm growing my joy.

It doesn't matter what's going on in my life, I'm choosing joy as I blow up this balloon.

And I will keep choosing joy - until my 'joy' balloon is fully inflated.

But as I pass over the trials of life, as my 'joy' balloon is exposed to the flame - it bursts!

So maybe it's not just a choice. Maybe in the moment Paul and Silas and Jesus weren't just deciding to choose joy. Maybe our effort and input alone is not enough.

I want us to turn to John 15:5-11 now to read a famous parable, a famous illustration given by Jesus. Jesus says:

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. **If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit;** apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. **If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy***

may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

The key phrases here for us: *"If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit."* You might know from Galatians that Paul, who we were talking about earlier, writes that the fruits we experience as we abide in God and God in us, that the fruits of His spirit are love, JOY, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, goodness, gentleness and self-control.

Jesus says, "remain in Me, remain in My love by keeping My commands." Keeping His commands, doing as He asks and going where He leads us is our way of demonstrating the trust and faith we have in Him. That we believe His ideas about life are right and we respond accordingly to that.

And then he says, "I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. Essentially if you remain in Me and I remain in you, and you follow where I call you, you will experience joy.:

Joy is not just a choice that happens in a moment; it is a fruit of walking intimately with Jesus. There is no point choosing joy and trying to grow it - Joy is a product.

It's like this balloon (filled with water). It's filled with the Spirit and so is producing joy. But as it passes over the trials in life, as it experiences the heat, it responds differently (it doesn't pop!). It responds differently because of what's inside it.

The balloon isn't experiencing the flame any differently, it can still feel the heat, it doesn't pretend it isn't there or chooses to just ignore it. In fact the balloon is doing nothing differently at all. The change is purely because of what is inside it.

So how do we do this? What does it mean to abide in Him and Him in us, for us to follow where He is calling us? And particularly, what does that look like when we are in the trials of life?

As Paul and Silas were in jail they rejoiced. Paul even in the letters he wrote to people, from jail, "Rejoice in the Lord always! I say it again, rejoice!"

The word rejoice means to come back to what brings you joy: Jesus. Come back to Jesus.

So I say to you guys, regardless of what your circumstances are, regardless of how you feel: rejoice! Come back to the source of your joy and the joy will come.

Joy comes from being near the joy maker.

We said earlier that joy for Paul and Silas and Jesus looked like having the bigger, kingdom

picture. That comes from walking intimately and knowing the Father. Walking intimately and knowing Him means that deep relational connection that comes from spending time with Him, reading your Bible, worshipping etc. - stuff we talk about quite a bit - but it also means *walking with him*, going where He goes, where He leads you.

I'm here today being ordained because I want to make a commitment to continue to walk with Jesus. I spent a number of years trying to walk my own way, trying to find joy. I felt God calling me to ministry, building passion in me for teens but I still wanted something different. I wanted to be in a medical profession and, longer than I should have, I stayed there trying to find joy. And when I couldn't find joy there, I tried sales. It was clear God was building in me a call to ministry and yet I was ignoring it because I didn't want that. But when I finally gave in, when I finally agreed to walk where Jesus was calling me, I found joy.

For me, my last 6 years in ministry hasn't always been easy. There are definitely easy, happy, fun times but there are also hard, tiring and even sad times. But I know as I press into Jesus, as I allow myself to abide in Him and Him in me and I walk where He is leading me, there is joy in ministering regardless of the season. And I will do this as long as God allows me to.

That's where God is walking me. Where is God walking you?

I want to know because I also get joy in doing it alongside others who are walking intimately with Jesus. My joy flourishes as I walk with Jesus with you guys.

Our youth, the teens of GRLC, are just incredible. I have found my joy flourishing as they have walked out their call to love and serve our community this year. They have been doing incredible things, even through lockdown!

I can feel my own joy growing, watching Kazz grow in her hope and peace and joy as she has had to press into God this last year.

My joy has grown in learning more from my Mum about what it means to disciple your children as she has been intentional to invest into my younger sister.

And Richard Tapp, with a car full of teenagers playing taxi as he has followed God to make a way for those kids to be part of our church community who couldn't otherwise is absolutely amazing. I get so much joy in that.

My joy increases as I speak to Tahlia about how she walks with Jesus every day as a high school teacher.

Or as my Dad shares about conversations he has with colleagues about his faith.

My joy flourishes as I walk intimately with Jesus and as I walk with you as you walk intimately with Jesus. And I know the same is true for each of us. You will find joy as you walk intimately with Jesus and it will flourish as you do it alongside others walking intimately with Jesus.

So, I'm going to finish by asking you not how much joy you have, or what one next step you can take to grow it, but simply: how are you walking with Jesus at the moment? And how are you walking with others as they walk with Jesus at the moment?

Because I know answering those questions will lead us to produce the fruit of joy. As you walk with the Joy-Maker you will have joy and your joy will flourish as you walk with others walking with the Joy-Maker. That is why I am so thankful to be part of such an amazing church family.

Maybe this is the first time you have heard of a joy that goes beyond your circumstances, a joy that comes from a person, Jesus. If that's you and you want to know more about walking with him I would love to talk to you about that, or I'm sure the person you've come with or in the row next to you would love to as well.

But for the rest of us, again, as Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always! I say it again, rejoice!" Come back to the source of your joy, Jesus.

A big thing we have been talking about this series is how we can be agents of God's kingdom in this advent time. As you live a joy filled life, your life is going to look different to those around you. As others watch you pass over the fires of life and manage it differently to them, share with them the reason. Share with them the reason for the joy you have in every season.