

This morning, we are in the third week of an Advent series that will draw its themes from the four Advent candles: Hope, peace, joy, and faith. This morning, we will look at the joy that Jesus gives us.

Luke 2:1-20 - *In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to his own town to register. ⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was **expecting a child.** ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. ⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great **joy** that will be for **all the people.** ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." ¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds **said to one another,** "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and **pondered them in her heart.** ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

What brings you joy? What gives you pleasure or delight? What do you go back to again and again to put a smile on your face.

Pictures of my children. UConn basketball. A job well done. Watching my boys do what they love.

There have been a lot of really joyous faces on my screen lately as my boys have been watching the World Cup. In fact, that seems to be one aspect that really

enhances joy beyond the pleasures and happiness of life: When all seems hopeless and then victory is snatched from the jaws of defeat. J.R.R. Tolkien called that a eucatastrophe – a sudden joyous turn. As he put it, *“it is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the “turn” comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality.”* Defeat seems certain, and then all of a sudden victory comes. Gandalf is alive. Darth Vader turns on the emperor. ET makes the bike fly. Joy is enhanced when a situation that seems hopeless turns into victory.

Joy is so necessary to a life truly worth living. But there is a big problem with joy. It doesn't last. In fact, sometimes present joy can increase future pain when you lose something or someone that brought you so much joy and happiness. If you've lost a loved one from death, divorce, you know that it hurts that much more when the love and joy was deep.

So what is the solution? How do we address our joy problem?

1) Do we keep chasing happiness?

Maybe we just need to keep pursuing the pleasures and happinesses of this life. But there's a problem with this.

***Ecclesiastes 2:10-11** - I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. ¹¹ Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.*

But it's not just the Bible, but science that argues this as well. As Tim Keller wrote in *Making Sense of God*:

“On January 7th, 2007, the New York Times Magazine ran an interesting article called ‘Happiness 101.’ It described positive psychology, a branch of psychology that seeks to take a scientific, empirical approach to what makes people happy. Researchers in this field have found that if you focus on doing things and getting things that give you pleasure, it does not lead to happiness but produces what one researcher has dubbed ‘the hedonic treadmill.’ You become addicted to pleasure,

and your need for the pleasure fix keeps growing: You have to do more and more. You're never really satisfied, never really happy.

If anyone has ever chased the high of an addiction, you know this to be true. Pursuing happiness is a sure way to make yourself miserable in the long run.

2) What about not letting your heart get attached to things or people?

Listen to how C.S. Lewis put it in *The Four Loves*:

“There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.

So if the problem is that our joys in this world do not last, what is the solution? Keep chasing happiness until you die? You'll only make yourself miserable. Protect your heart from pain by not getting too attached emotionally to anything? You will be cold. Is there any other solution?

Luke 2:10-11 - *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*

The answer is found in Jesus. If all the joys of this world will ultimately fade away, the answer is finding your ultimate joy in something outside of this world, so that your joy does not rise and fall with your circumstances.

The thing is that there is real joy to be found in this world, but it is fleeting. And if this world is all there is, then those moments of joy can lead to even greater pain when you've lost them. But the truth of Christmas, the truth of the gospel, is that there is a greater joy that all of the joys of this world point to, and that joy can be yours forever.

As C.S. Lewis put it: *“Most people, if they have really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, **can really satisfy**. I am not speaking of what would be ordinarily called unsuccessful marriages, or holidays, or learned careers. I am speaking of the best possible ones. There was something we have grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in the reality. I think everyone knows what I mean. The wife may be a good wife, and the hotels and scenery may have been excellent, and chemistry may be a very interesting job, **but something has evaded us**... If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.”*

There is a greater joy that all of the fleeting pleasures and joys of this world point to. The solution is to recognize that the pleasures of this world will not fully satisfy what your heart is longing for. Only God will satisfy you, so pursue Him with your whole heart. As St. Augustine put it, *“You have made us for yourself, and **our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.**”*

Pursue joy, yes, but recognize that the ultimate joy does not come from the pleasures of this world but comes from God, the one you were created for. Again, C.S. Lewis from *The Weight of Glory*:

“If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

So what is the joy that Jesus brings?

Ephesians 2:1-10 - *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*

³ *All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*

We were lost. Our sin had separated us from God. We were under the rule of the evil one and under God's just condemnation.

⁴ *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

We are talking about THE eucatastrophe, the joyous turn, that we who once were lost are now found. Out of the darkness, a glorious light. In our sin and misery comes salvation and glory. From the despair of the cross comes the wonder of the resurrection. Out of death, life. We have been rescued. We can know God. We can enjoy Him forever.

We're not talking about belief here. We are talking about love. We are talking about joy. If you don't know this, ask him for it.

John 16:24 - *Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.*

Every happiness and pleasure and joy in this life is fleeting. It will not last, because our circumstances are always changing. And those things that once brought us great joy may end up bringing greater pain in the long run. The answer is not found in chasing after pleasure, or in hardening your heart, but in finding your ultimate joy in God, who does not change with your circumstances. Even in your sorrows, you know that, as we said about hope two weeks ago, your bad things will turn out for good, your good things can not be taken from you, and the best is yet to come. Only in Him can we have joy, even in the midst of sorrow and difficulty.

2 Corinthians 6:10 - *sorrowful, yet always rejoicing*

James 1:2-3 - Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Hebrews 12:2 - Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. But they are the same thing. To glorify is to enjoy God. To worship is to delight. To live for God and not for the fleeting pleasures of this world is where true, lasting, eternal joy is found.

Psalm 37:4 - Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalm 16:11 - You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand

We find our greatest joy in worshiping and living for God, because that is what we were created for. C.S. Lewis did the best job of explaining this. As he wrote in Reflections on the Psalms:

“We all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue, intelligence, or delightfulness; we despise even more the crowd of people round every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who gratify that demand... worse still was the statement put into God’s own mouth, ‘whoso offereth me thanks and praise, he honoureth me’ (Psalm 50:23). It is hideously like saying, ‘What I most want is to be told that I am good and great.’”

“But the most obvious fact about praise – whether of God or anything – strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honour. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless (sometimes even if) shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it. The world rings with praise – lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game... I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: “Isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t it glorious? Don’t you think that magnificent?” The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about.

Praise is a natural thing – when we enjoy something, we want to praise it. When you feel that someone is beautiful, you want to tell them. If someone has made you proud, you want to tell them. If you read a great book or watch a great movie, you want to praise it to others. If you love a team or player, you want to talk about how great they are. When you experience a beautiful sunset, or breathtaking mountain view, or incredible waterfall, you want to praise it, share it with others. When we enjoy something, we naturally want to praise it.

*I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to **keep silent** because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with... The worthier the object, the more intense this delight would be. If it were possible for a created soul fully to “appreciate”, that is to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all, and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight perfect expression, then that soul would be in supreme beatitude.*

When we enjoy something, our delight is incomplete until it is expressed. Ever watch a movie by yourself? See a moving video? Listen to an amazing song? Read an inspiring article? What do you want to do? Tell others about it! Post it on Facebook or share it on Instagram! Express to others how amazing it is and hope that others join you in praising it! Shout it from the rooftops so that others will join in praising and share in the enjoyment! Share it with others so that they can join you in praising it.

*It is along these lines that I find it easiest to understand the Christian doctrine that “Heaven” is a state in which angels now, and men hereafter, are perpetually employed in praising God... To see what the doctrine really means, we must suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God – drunk with, drowned in, dissolved by, that delight which, far from remaining pent up within ourselves as incommunicable, hence hardly tolerable, bliss, flows out from us incessantly again in effortless **and perfect expression**, our joy no more separable from the praise in which it liberates and utters itself than the brightness a mirror receives is separable from the brightness it sheds. The Scotch catechism says that man’s chief end is “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” But we shall then know that these*

are the same thing. *Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.*”

You were created for God, to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. If this makes no sense to you, then please ask Him to reveal this to you. To worship Him, to live for Him, to bring Him glory by how we live and how we love others. To find our joy in the hope of eternity with Him.

Ask God to reveal to you His beauty, His greatness, His love, that you might desire Him: to know Him, to love Him, to follow Him.

John 10:10 - The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Let this be God’s invitation to you this morning:

Isaiah 55:1-3 - "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. ³ Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.