

“What Do We Really Want for Christmas? JOY”

Luke 1.46-55

Sunday, December 17, 2017

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Madison WI

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Our Gospel reading is the Magnificat, Mary's song. In the original text, it's fascinating to notice the mixture of past, present, and future tenses, as if Mary is aware that God has been at work and will continue to be at work. She also seems to have keen awareness that God envisions a sort of great reversal of things, with particular concern for the forgotten, the lowly, the hungry. Listen for God's word, Mary's song of JOY.

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,

and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

What do you really want for Christmas? I mean really, deep down? A new sweater, or new toy, or new gadget could be wonderful. Star Wars tickets maybe? It's a wonderful thing to give and receive gifts.

But at a deep level we want something more. We want what God offers us: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

Of all these gifts of the season, I think JOY may be the most challenging to understand.

I think there are different types of joy, and we go through stages of joy.



When we're young, joy centers around us. What makes me happy. What's under the tree for me. Me me me. When we get something that we want, we are overcome with joy.

This child-like joy is not bad, but as we get older, it hopefully grows and matures. We learn about sharing joy together, rejoicing with others.

One way we experience this joy is through sports.

When a team wins a championship after decades of losing, there is much joy, as there was in Chicago when the Cub won the World Series.



As wonderful as a child's joy is, as wonderful as a team's joy is after winning the big game there is a deeper level of joy, of making life better for other people, of serving people in need.

It's the joy of using our own unique life situations to make a difference.

Look at Mary.

When she hears from the angel earlier in Luke about her unique calling to give birth to Jesus, she humbly says: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

And then in her song, we get a sense that she knows that God is in the process of turning the world around, of bringing in justice and righteous, and she rejoices at being part of that process to make the world a better place. And thus she rejoices.

With Mary’s example, it seems that God is inviting us to not just think about ourselves, but recognize the big picture and do whatever we can, wherever we are, to serve people in need.



I thought of that last week when I read about a young man named John Frates. John’s grandmother was always a big fan of word-search puzzles.

But after her husband died, John’s grandmother’s dementia got worse, and she was no longer able to finish the puzzles she loved.

So teenage John made special puzzles for her, with a bigger font, simplified words, and no more pesky backward or diagonal answers.

John developed many puzzles for his grandma, and she loved them.

He told a reporter:

“Every time I showed her a new word search, her eyes lit up. I think she likes the puzzle titled ‘Vacation’ the most since it brings back lots of fun memories.”

<https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/grandma-alzheimers-cant-puzzles-teen-comes-perfect-solution/>

Other families seemed interested, so John published a book. The puzzles are now for sale, as “Grandma and Grandpa’s Word Searches” with proceeds going to support Alzheimers research.

<https://www.amazon.com/Grandma-Grandpas-Searches-Simple-Problems/dp/1946208612>

This young man discovered joy in serving people in need, people who could have been ignored and forgotten, using his unique life situation, his particular skills and interests.

Who might be in your life that is being ignored, forgotten? Who might be carrying a heavy burden that you could share?

As we celebrate the good news of great joy, as we rejoice in God our savior, let’s find ways to share the joy.

This is the day the Lord has made!

Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.