

Joy - Open door talk 7 Dec 25

‘Good news of great joy’ – Luke 2:10 these were the words.... of the angels to the shepherds that we will be hearing over the next few weeks in nativities and carol services

‘Joy to the world’ will be words that we sing over the Christmas period

All this joy and it is only the second Sunday of Advent – traditionally it is the third Sunday of Advent that is associated with joy, sometimes known as Laudate Sunday.

St Paul in Philippians (4:4) instructs us to ‘Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.! Well do we? No most of us don’t

Well to start with - what is joy? Being happy? Well yes. But it is much more than that it is about a deep contentment within us, which can be there even when things are difficult all around us.

I wonder what are the things that brings us joy? Any thoughts...?

At the very beginning of the Bible – God stands back and looks with joy at nature. But due to their actions, Adam and Eve are forced to leave the beautiful garden and the presence of the God of all joy, and to go out into the world.

I imagine that many of you will have read the book or watched the film of the ‘*Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*’ by CS Lewis. The main characters Peter, Edmund, Susan and Lucy stumble through an old wardrobe into the magical kingdom of Narnia which the evil White Witch had turned into a place where it was always winter and never Christmas. The forest is completely silent for everyone lives in fear. Even the birds don’t sing. Narnia is completely without joy – it has been repressed by the white witch. We might

be able to think of a time in our lives, or perhaps now even, when we feel like that.

In Narnia, it is only the return of Aslan, the Christ-like lion that brings the return of spring, with the melting of snow and a new order of things with a return of joy and peace and justice. In the story nature comes to life again with flowers, birdsong and the warmth of the sun once again.

Being outside in God's creation is a place where I think many of us find joy. Even though for us now, it is winter, as we go out into the fields, by the sea or perhaps walking in the mountains we might find joy and beauty and perhaps some peace too just being outside. I think that was one of the things many of us discovered in lockdown although that feels quite a long time ago although it wasn't really.... We can look for joy in the created world around us.

Another place where we might find joy is in meals. Many of us here are probably beginning to think about the preparations for Christmas celebrations. I know some people have already made their Christmas puddings and Christmas cakes and then there will be all the turkey and trimmings that will need to be prepared in the days in the run up to Christmas day itself. Christmas meals might be filled with joy, but I know they can often be very stressful times for families as we are thrown together, with people we don't often spend that much time with.

Cast your mind back to a truly memorable meal... I wonder, what was it about that meal that you remember – the people, the place, the food... some of my most memorable meals were the ones that lasted for ages - where I sat and talked and talked between the courses with those who were around me. In the Narnia books

there are also important meals. You might remember the meal the children had with Mr and Mrs Beaver.

At this point in the story it is still winter. Mr. Beaver finds the children in the woods and takes them to safety at his home with Mrs. Beaver. They shared a meal of fish, caught by Mr. Beaver and the boys, potatoes with butter, hot cups of tea and a “great and glorious sticky marmalade roll.” After the meal, Mr. Beaver says to the children, “Why, now we can get to business.” This conversation becomes a critical turning point, a significant moment in the story and in the lives of the children as they learn about Aslan the lion. Meals with others can be places where we can discover joy. And when we gather around the communion table together as God’s family in this place that is also true, it is a special moment where Christ is present and a moment of joy.

Joy is one of those things that we need to practice; or at the very least we need to make ourselves open to the possibility of joy. Yes, we have to work and serve God but whilst doing that we can enjoy God, and through him our friends and families, our food, our sleep, our jokes, birdsong and the sun or rain around us. They are all there to be enjoyed.

I know, it is not always easy, there are times in all our lives when things are particularly difficult and we might need help from others, including health care professionals to help us; but we can all practise opening ourselves to spontaneous moments of joy

And since we are in season of Advent, now is a good time to practise, to be aware and attentive to what is happening around us - the shaft of light through the trees, a spider’s web with dew on it, the frost on the grass, a rainbow, the giggle of a child. We

can be intentional about noticing, and to stop and to enjoy those moments

But to really enter into the joy of Christ himself we have to humble ourselves, to admit our faults ,and we all have them - and in doing so we obtain forgiveness and discover a new joy – we can have a relationship with God, we are saved, we have found salvation.

Isaiash says that ‘With Joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation’ (Is 12:3).

This hymn of praise that we have heard this morning comes at the end of several chapter of warnings of judgement and terrible things to come. However, in Isaiah 12:1–6 the prophet invites us to pause and reflect on this deeper joy that comes from the most miraculous and awe-inspiring present ever given to humanity: the joy of divine salvation that flows from the powerful presence of the Creator of the cosmos.

In 1984 the liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez published a book entitled ‘*we drink from our own wells*’. He wrote of the joy that comes from the conviction that suffering born out of injustice will be overcome because God is a God of life and love. That feels very hard after all God doesn’t cause suffering. But perhaps it is a reminder that joy can be found even in the most terrible of situations and is related to us looking ahead to God’s promises to us being fulfilled in the next world if not in this.

Joy is one of God’s gifts, it is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit that we have been talking about this term and it is given to us as part of the abundant life in Christ. And we are meant to share that joy with the world around us – at school, college, work and in our community.

So this Advent let's practise joy, resolving to take time out with Jesus in His presence; let's look out for those moments of spontaneous and unexpected joy that happen all around us and let's share that Joy with those we meet.

For as the prophet Nehemiah says and as we will shortly sing 'The joy of the Lord is your strength' (Neh 8:19).