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Finding Joy

Advent begins this Sunday. One of the key themes of Advent is joy. We hear about it, hope for it, but it often is elusive. Where, how do we find it?

The focus of this season often is on the beauty, warmth of the season, even the *perfect* Christmas.



Do I need to remind us that this season can be very busy, hectic, even chaotic? After hearing an Advent sermon on joy one man said, “Am I supposed to take my already too busy life and add another layer of this season to it, and be filled with joy? *Seriously?*”

The difficulty of finding joy comes in large part from failing to understand that true joy, God’s joy, is not what many people think it is. Most people think joy is something that happens to them, the happy, glad feelings they have because something nice, good, beautiful or wonderful happens. True joy is not a fleeting feeling based on your circumstances.

My working description of joy from Scripture is that it is God’s gift of steadfast delightful certainty. King David tells us in Psalm 16 that joy belongs to God (verse 11), and his son Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes chapter 2 that God gives joy to His people (verse 26). As nice as the momentary, exhilarating feelings from good things happening to us are, true joy is much more, it is much better!

Jesus promised us His joy which makes our joy complete (John 15:11), and that it is a joy no one can take away from us (John 16:22). The Holy Spirit is at work in every believer to produce the *fruit*, the character of joy, of steadfast delightful certainty, as we let Him control and direct us (Galatians 5:22).

Knowing this we also recognize that everyone in every age and season faces obstacles to experiencing joy. We contend with busyness and rushing around, seemingly countless demands and duties. We experience the losses of people we love, of valuable relationships, of a job. There are the memories of the past, past failures, disappointments, terrible hurts, along with problems in the present and worries about the future.

The pages of the Bible give us many examples of people who experienced God's joy even in tough times. Carefully, slowly read about Mary's experience in Luke chapters 1 and 2 today. Try to read this as if you had never read or heard it before. Enter into the surprising and shocking chaos that burst into her life. Also pay attention to her joy in and through that reflected in part by her statement,

“My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has *rejoiced* in God my Savior.”
(2:46-47)

How did she, how have so many of God's people down through the years been able to be joyful in difficult, chaotic situations?

They recognized that true joy is a gift from God.

They understood that true joy does not depend on their circumstances.

They chose to believe and obey God.

They decided to order their life according to God's priorities, not their own or those of people around them.

As the Christmas season begins, make sure that you find joy, the real thing. Determine to live filled by and overflowing with the joy of God, God who sent His son into this world to bring us everlasting life and joy.

Pastor Lyle