

People Get Ready!

[Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11, John 1:6-8, 19-28](#)

Today is a little odd. We lit the funky candle today – the pink one. This is the candle of Joy. Our scripture lessons seem to echo this sentiment. Isaiah 61:3 predicts the arrival of the Messiah who will provide for those who mourn; to give them a garland instead of ashes; the oil of gladness instead of mourning; the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. You may recall the story of Jesus when he went to the temple in his hometown at the beginning of his ministry. He was handed the scripture to read and this scripture in Isaiah was the one he read. We're not sure if Jesus chose that scripture or if it was already selected. In Luke chapter 4:17-21, Jesus reads this passage, hands the scroll back and sits down. He tells those present, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

We know that Christmas day is a time for joy – a time for celebration at the birth of Jesus. So I'm guessing that today is a bit of a pre-game celebration. As we look back at the path we've traveled so far during advent, the first Sunday we lit the candle of hope. Today's scripture sends a message of hope as well. The Messiah is sent to bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the brokenhearted, and provide for those who mourn. We have an uncompromising hope in Jesus the Messiah. We can find strength in that hope. We have the hope of a companion to walk with us throughout our trials. We know times will get hard – life will be difficult at times. But we have the hope of one who loves and cares for us to see us through. We also have the hope of everlasting life – this world is not our final resting place.

Last week we lit the candle of Peace. Today's scripture also seems to include this message. "He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and release the prisoners." Isaiah 61 verse 4 says, "they shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities." This sounds like the calm after the storm. We have the gift of hope – a companion to see us through the difficult times. And we have the promise of peace even when we can only see chaos.

Today our focus is on Joy. It is another one of those gifts that seems to grow and multiply the more you give it away. Joy can spread like wildfire. It is most definitely contagious! I am sure we have all met people that just seem to exude Joy – you feel better just being around them. The apostle Paul managed to find joy in a Roman prison. It seems to me true joy comes from God. It is sustainable – it can get you through the dry desert if

you keep your eye on the oasis. It can get you through finals week! It can get you through lines at the mall! It can get you through health issues or family trials.

I wanted to share this story from Pastor Matt Sergent – I believe this one has been around the e-mail circuit as well.

John is the kind of guy you love to hate. He is always in a good mood and always has something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, ‘If I were any better, I would be twins!’

He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, John was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation. Seeing this style really made me curious, so one day I went up and asked him, ‘I don’t get it! You can’t be a positive person all the time. How do you do it?’ He replied, ‘Each morning I wake up and say to myself, you

have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or ... you can choose to be in a bad mood. I choose to be in a good mood. Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or ... I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or ... I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life.'

'Yeah right, it's not that easy,' I protested.

'Yes it is,' he said. 'Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people affect you mood. You choose to be in a good mood or a bad mood. The bottom line: It's your choice how you live your life.'

I reflected on what he said. Soon hereafter, I left the Tower Industry to start my own business. We lost touch, but I often

thought about him when I made a choice about life instead of reacting to it. Several years later, I heard that he was involved in a serious accident, falling some 60 feet from a communications tower. After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, he was released from the hospital with rods in his back. I saw him about 6 months after the accident. When I asked him how he was, he replied, 'If I were any better, I'd be twins ... want to see my scars?'

I declined to see his wounds, but I did ask him what had gone through his mind as the accident took place. 'The first thing that went through my mind was the well-being of my soon-to-be-born daughter,' he replied. 'Then, as I lay on the ground, I remembered I had two choices: I could choose to live or...I could choose to die. I chose to live.'

Weren't you scared? Did you lose consciousness?' I asked. He continued, '...the paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the ER and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes, I read, 'he's a dead man'. I knew I needed to take action.'

'What did you do?' I asked.

'Well, there was a big burly nurse shouting questions at me,' said John. 'She asked if I was allergic to anything. 'Yes,' I replied. The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply. I took a deep breath and yelled, 'GRAVITY!' 'Over their laughter, I told them, 'I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead.'

He lived, thanks to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude ... I learned from him that every day we

have the choice to live fully. Attitude after all is everything.

Jesus said, 'Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.' After all, today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday.

Hope, peace, joy – we are well on our way to the celebration of Christmas. As John told us in today's scripture, prepare the way of the Lord. People get ready – Jesus is coming! Amen.