

Commune with God

[Isaiah 12:2-6](#), [Philippians 4:4-7](#)

We are already up to week three of Advent where we get to light the odd candle – the pink one – the candle of joy. When we began Advent, we focused on hope the first week and peace last week. It is interesting that we proceed in that order – hope, peace, and joy. We light these candles as symbols to remind us of the road to the celebration of the birth of the Messiah. As the first candle is the candle of hope, Advent is known as the season of hope and so I ask you, have you personally lit the candle of hope in your heart?

Maybe you've heard the sayings, "Hope springs eternal." "Hope floats." Even in our darkest times, hope can find its way into our hearts. I can think of times in my life when things seemed hopeless. I can think of times in this congregation when things seemed hopeless. Yet the sun rose the next day. The

darkness was abated. The path was found as we trusted God to care for our needs. I think many of us felt quite hopeless when we opened up the hall floor and saw just how bad the damage was. It certainly looked like there would be no way to save that building, yet it held so much meaning for so many, not to mention the fact that we are seeking ways to connect with our community. That building was important to us in every way. Yet we had to trust that God was with us and we held on to our hope. If you haven't had a chance to look at the building now you can see the work of so many dedicated volunteers who would not be hindered by despair. A small faith community that clings to the hope of God can truly do mighty things. Have you personally lit the candle of hope in your heart?

The next candle in the ring was lit last week is the candle of peace. This seems like a natural progression. I think it is

impossible to find peace with God unless we have found hope in God. What is real peace? I heard a story of an airline counter attendant that was checking in an extremely irate customer. The man was literally inches from the attendant's face and yelling at the top of his lungs, complaining that his flight was delayed. There was no reasoning with this customer, and ironically the attendant didn't even try. The attendant simply maintained his professional smile and went through the process of checking in this customer. The attendant even wished the customer well on his journey. After the customer left in a huff, a reporter approached the attendant and asked how he could maintain his composure and remain calm and at peace in the face of such adversity. The attendant smiled and said, "It's not a problem. He's going to Minneapolis – his luggage is going to Japan!"

I'll preach on revenge another Sunday! Have we also been faced with extreme circumstances and yet been able to find a measure of peace? I feel I go through this every semester! One of the benefits of attending seminary is the opportunity to attend worship every week. No classes are conducted during worship time to allow everyone the opportunity to find peace with God. Our assistant dean preached a sermon during midterm week on the story of when Jesus was asleep in the boat while the disciples were battling a fierce storm at sea. They woke Jesus and said, "Teacher, do you not care that we perish?" She then said it again, "Teacher, do you not care that we perish?" At this point the laughter rippled through the chapel as students were thinking of their own contexts! So I ask you, have you lit your personal candle of peace? During the busyness of this Advent season, can we find that inner peace that can only come from God?

Today's focus is joy. It is interesting that even in times of distress we can find joy. In our scripture lesson from Philippians today, Paul was speaking to the church in Philippi while he was sitting in a Roman jail. He seemed to sense that he was coming to the end of his life on this earth, yet he wanted to get a special message to this church who was struggling to find their joy. Persecutions had become a reality for many Christians at the time and people lived in fear for their lives. Yet in spite of these harsh circumstances, Paul speaks of finding joy in the midst of adversity. That kind of joy can only come from God.

Again I'll use the hall renovation as an example. I wasn't here for much of the project but I remember the one day a group of us came and were hauling beams outside in order to clear out the area and prepare for the cement floor to be poured. It was hot, dirty work yet we were laughing as we worked. We felt

like we were doing something important. In spite of the small size of this congregation, we found joy while facing that difficult situation. We may not have been the most professional group but the task was done and we all left with a feeling of accomplishment. God was with us.

During this advent season, have you been able to light your personal candle of joy? There are plenty of things that can get in our way. Stress can be detrimental to our joy. Busyness can be detrimental to our joy. Worry can be detrimental to our joy. Can we leave all our concerns and our busyness and our stress with God and light our candle of joy? I've entitled this sermon, *Commune with God*. Let us find that place where we can seek out God and listen for God's response. When we truly commune with God, we can find that hope, peace, and joy that surpasses all understanding. Paul ends this passage in

Philippians with, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Let us find our strength in the coming of the Messiah as we celebrate throughout this season of perpetual hope. I wanted to close with a school project, believe it or not. A real perk for me is to be able to take items I’ve prepared for class and apply them directly in the church. This slide show reflects my interpretation of the Philippians 4:4-13 scripture.

[Click here for slide show.](#)

Let the church say ‘Amen.’