

The Third Sunday of Advent
15-12-2024
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Zephaniah 3: 14-20 Rejoice in the Lord, he has taken away your judgment

Psalm -A Song of Isaiah God is my Salvation, Shout and sing for Joy

Philippians 4: 4-7 Rejoice in the Lord Always

Luke 3: 7-18 John the Baptist
Baptising, Teaching and proclaiming Jesus.

Introduction

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent. The Advent season is a time set aside in our church calendar to prepare, both for the celebration of Christmas, and also, for when Jesus will come again.

The theme for today is Joy and Rejoicing. In the Bible readings set down for today, the first three are on joy and rejoicing and the Gospel reading focuses on the theme of repentance, which we looked at last week. This week I would like to focus on the fact that as Christians we are called to rejoice in life.

Rejoicing / Joy

As Christians we are called to live Joyful lives. Our salvation comes by God's grace through faith. We cannot earn it by our deeds. If we have come to repentance and decided to place all of our faith, and hope, and trust in Jesus, then we can have full assurance of God's loving forgiveness, and that we are accepted as God's children. It is in knowing God's grace for us, that we can be assured of the joy God gives us, and be enabled to rejoice in our lives.

I must admit to struggling with being joyful at times. Being joyful is something we have to constantly work at in our lives. At times we may find it easier, and at times we may struggle.

There are times in our lives when we will be in mourning, or sad or even rightly angry at things that are happening. This is of course all normal. Being joyful and rejoicing is a choice we make and not feelings we have.

We need to be reminded that Joy is different to Happiness. Our emotions and moods may change based on the situations we face in life, but as Christians we can still live with an inner joy.

We see in the gospels how Jesus himself went through all the various ranges emotions, from tiredness, to sadness, and even righteous anger, when confronted with the Pharisees or the moneychangers in the temple. So, what does it mean for us to be joyful, or to put it another way, to rejoice?

Rejoicing in Philippians

Let us look through today's reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians, and see what guidance we can take in living joyful lives.

Verse 4 - ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

In this verse it doesn't say rejoice sometimes, or rejoice when your feeling really good, it says rejoice always. This can be difficult to get our heads around, but it is something God will help us do if we are trusting in God's presence in our lives. And Paul must think it is important because he says it twice.

Verse 5 - ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

This verse is a little different. It challenges us as Christians, to be gentle people. This is not something that our society would generally see as a great virtue. It seems good, but I wonder how many people would consciously seek to actually be gentle. Do people look at you and think that you are gentle?

If we are going to live joyful lives then I think being a gentle person, and being known as a gentle person will definitely help.

Verse 6 – ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

In this verse we are told not to worry about anything. I am by nature a worrier about things. All of you who have children will know that even the best ones are bound to make you worry at times. I recall midway through my brief engineering career being worried about the many challenges of large concrete pours and all the things that could go wrong. I had to learn to trust God more, and it is an ongoing work in my Christian journey.

Paul is not telling the Philippians to be careless though. He tells them to take everything to God in prayer.

Are you worried about something? Take it to God in prayer.

God tells us not to worry. We are not called to be careless though. We are called to be concerned, and we are called to pray.

I think the Serenity prayer is a wonderful help in guiding us not to worry unnecessarily.

God, Grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the Courage to change the things I can, and the Wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

By taking our concerns to God in pray and by giving thanks to God for the blessings in our lives we will be helped to live joyful lives.

Verse 7 - ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

In last weeks reflection we talked about knowing God's peace. If we repent and know God's forgiveness, we will receive God's peace. And knowing God's peace will allow us to live joyful lives.

An Example of a Joyful Life

I know I have shared this story with you before, but would like to share with you an example of what I believe was a life joyfully lived.

When I began full time ministry as a curate in Sunnybank Brisbane, there was an elderly lady in the congregation. She was in her nineties and had just retired as a Sunday School helper. The kids still loved her, and I recall her being mobbed once by children at the greeting of the peace.

During my time there her mobility decreased to the point where she could no longer walk, and she had to move out of the house she shared with her daughter and into a nursing home. I would visit her, and it was clear she was in quite a bit of pain. She told me many wonderful stories of her faith and how she trusted and felt God's presence in her life. I would go to pray with her, but she always, prayed for our church, our rector, and for me and my family. I thought I was going to minister with her, but she was ministering to me. She was rejoicing even though physically, she knew she was coming to the end of her life.

Her total acceptance of Jesus, allowed her to rejoice.

And when I lead her funeral service, I was sad, because I loved her, but I felt really able to rejoice in a life lived well for God.

Is there anything you are holding back from God, which doesn't allow you to rejoice like this lady?

Conclusion

Rejoicing and repentance seem to be words that are opposed to one another.

Yet if we are true to our calling as followers of Jesus then we will repent, and we will be enabled to know God's peace in our lives. And knowing God's peace will in turn lead us to be able to rejoice, and to live lives of Joy for God.

Rejoicing in God is a way of life which we must choose, but it is also the best choice we can make for our lives.

We may not always be happy, but we can be assured that in Jesus, the Joy of God will never leave us.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Amen.