

## **THE GIFT OF JOY**

### **John 1:6-8, 19-28**

The first Sunday of Advent we opened the gift of hope, last Sunday we opened the gift of the way and this morning we open the gift of joy. You might say this gift is not always readily noticed among the other packages. I share this because you can't find it based on the color of its wrappings nor the size of the package. Its mere presence is its gift although at times, when things aren't going our way, this gift may be difficult to find. Are you confused or do you have questions? Maybe we just need to start unwrapping this gift and experience it.

I don't know if you have heard or not, but there is an email going round that warns of a very powerful virus spreading in epidemic proportions. Hopefully you all have been vaccinated. This particular virus is called "inner peace". Be on the alert, it says, for symptoms of inner peace that could pose a serious threat to what has, up to now, been a fairly stable condition of conflict in the world. Some signs and symptoms of inner peace:

- +A tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than on fears based on past experiences.

- + An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment.

- + A loss of interest in judging other people or blaming them for our circumstances.
- + A loss of interest in conflict.
- + A loss of interest of the ability to worry, especially about ourselves.
- + Frequent, overwhelming episodes of appreciation.
- + Contented feelings of connectedness with others and nature.
- + Frequent attacks of smiling or laughing.
- + An increasing tendency to allow things to happen rather than make them happen.
- + An increased susceptibility to the love extended by others as well as the uncontrollable urge to extend it.

The person sending that e-mail warning might have read our story of John the Baptist which also threatens an outbreak of joy and hope and light in a world that had long forgotten how to experience these things.

John the Baptist models a behavior from which the church can draw rich lessons. The church points the way to the object of our faith, which is Jesus. We exist to serve Jesus. Everything about us and all that we do

should point to the one who is the “true light”. Everyday and in every way we should radiate the true light.

On this third Sunday of Advent we remember our brother John the Baptist, who pointed beyond himself and his circumstances or life, to the one he called “the Lamb of God,” and we need to always remind ourselves that this one gave himself for the sins of the whole world.

Often times the church and Christians may speak with an authority that belongs only to Christ. When we are confronted by those who question our motives and actions as Christians, the writer of this Gospel reminds us that we would do well to remember who we are. We are witnesses of something and Someone who is greater than we are. We are not the light, but we are those who give testimony to and are witnesses of the Light. Our language and behavior are always to be pointers to Someone who is greater than we are, thereby drawing others to Christ.

When doing Christ’s work in here or in our community, we need to be effective followers of Jesus Christ. To help bring people to their senses and address the sin that plagues all of us, with a message and work of hope that

will invite inquisitiveness. Who are you? What are you doing? Or What makes you do what you do?

We, like John, need to be able to answer when questioned about who we are and whose we are by remembering that even though we are not the light, we radiate the light.

In his book, “Letting God Bless You”, John Killinger concludes with this challenge:

“Permit God to bless you. Don’t look around you and think how hard life is. Look around and see how filled with mystery and goodness it is. See how wonderful the world looks when you know God is at work redeeming it and setting up the anti-structures, so that humility and purity and compassion and longing for justice and peace will all be fulfilled and rewarded in the eternal scheme of things.

Give thanks to God for the richness of existence. Then look around to see who you can share it with. That will make you even richer.

If you will learn to live this way every day, you will always have a song in your heart and the path before you will be lined with flowers. Joy will spring up inside you like a fountain, and you will lie down to sleep at

night with peace in your soul. And you will say, “Blessed be the name of our God forever and ever, who calls us to a new rule where righteousness will be the order of the day forever!”

This Advent season, my friends, let us choose the Lord to be our joy ... a choice of permitting God to bless us and to fill us with a new sense of hope and purposeful living. Let us live in the assurance that the present darkness is not our final destination, that there is indeed much more yet to come. Along the way we will begin to experience joy springing up within us like a fountain. Thanks be to God, who blesses us with love and grace beyond measure. Amen.