



Daring to have Joy

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Each year as the third week of Advent comes around, I struggle with its theme: **Joy**. Joy is such an integral part of Christmas, especially if there are happy, excited children in your life. There is the joy of reunions with family and friends; the joy of music and presents and yummy food; the joy of lights and decorations; and, most important of all, the joy of God entering into creation in the form of Jesus.

Not everyone is able to feel the joy of Advent and Christmas, tho. For those who are hurting – for any number of reasons – the atmosphere of this time of year can amplify feelings of pain, grief, loneliness, or despair. For them, Christmas is something to be endured rather than celebrated. Joy can also be hard to feel in the face of the tumult of our world: conflicts in the Mideast, Ukraine, and Sudan; poverty and homelessness in our towns and cities; the increasing damage and devastation from climate change; a culture of divisiveness; and so much more.

Yet into the tumult and the hurting is exactly where Christ comes. Madeline L’Engle writes in her poem *First Coming*, “God did not wait till the world was ready, ‘till nations were at peace. God came when the Heavens were unsteady and prisoners cried out for release. God did not wait for the perfect time. God came when the need was deep and great.” Jesus steps right into our pain and tumult. He joins in our jubilant celebrations and weeps with us in our sorrows. Because Jesus has come, we can dare to have joy.

Joy, not merely an abundance of cheerfulness. The Apostle Paul says to the Thessalonians: “Rejoice always.” In the face of tragedy, “cheerfulness” seems saccharine-false, a slap in the face to the ones in pain. But to rejoice always ... that’s a different story. Rejoice always doesn’t mean to celebrate tragedy but to be aware of the loving presence of God walking thru it with us, bringing healing & hope, growing good things from the seeds watered with the tears of despair.

Christmas calls us to rejoice, not because the world has become a utopia and everyone is living out a fantasy, but because we don’t live out this less-than-perfect existence all on our own. God loves us so much, God wants to be with us so much, that God has come among us as a baby. Jesus grew up to live as God’s love on earth. And God continues with us now thru the Holy Spirit. Christ came to bring Good News – tidings of great joy! – to bind up the broken hearted, to bring liberty and release. May we rejoice and spread God’s joy to others by following in his way.

Grace and Peace.

Lisa

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