

**Sunday December 15, 2024**  
**Third Sunday of Advent**

**MEDITATION: “Joy”**

Two weeks ago we heard Jeremiah’s word of hope to those being taken into exile, and how we are called to bear hope to the world we live in.

Last week what I intended to communicate is that the road to peace is paved with justice and righteousness, and we are called to pave that road with our own acts of justice and righteousness.

This week we hear a message from Zephaniah. Actually, it’s more of a command really, “Rejoice!” It’s difficult to rejoice when the world squeezes the joy out of you. I don’t know how hectic your week was, but I certainly felt all out of joy. In addition to today’s service, I have five other services, all in various stages of completion, rattling around my head.... and that only takes us to January 5.

On the news last night we watched the crowds in South Korea rejoice as their parliament voted to impeach the president for declaring marshal law. On their faces we saw a mixture of joy, and relief, relief that democracy was preserved, at least for the moment. There was also joy on the faces of Syrians. Joy because the brutal regime of Bashar al-Assad is over. The fifty-year dynasty of the Assad family is at an end. And it isn’t just the Syrians in Syria rejoicing, but the Syrian diaspora around the world that is celebrating. Along with joy, one can see hope in the faces of Syrians. Hope for a future where people can live in peace and rebuild lives and livelihoods and a country that have been shattered by years of civil war. There was also a report on a medical mission to Kenya. A large team of doctors and nurses from Vancouver had gone to operate on many, mostly children, who had cleft palates. The joy on the faces of parents, starting when they realized their children would be operated on, was beautiful. The joy on the faces of the children was even more beautiful. The one case that really shone was the mother who had a cleft lip that she had lived with while she raised her own children. It was time for her to receive care, and to be healed, not just physically, but emotionally, psychologically, spiritually

healed. As she left for home, after her recovery, she was able to laugh.... With joy, no doubt.

I remember the anticipatory joy several years ago when my daughter was about to be born. I knew she was alive, could see and feel her moving inside her mother. I knew that life would be forever changed in the near future. On New Year's day things did change. The anticipation of joy turned into joy itself. I remember holding my daughter gingerly, surrounded by nurses in the delivery room. She was so small, 5 lb. 5 oz., and so delicate, and she had ten perfect little fingers and ten perfect little toes. And as I think back on that moment I wonder, what exactly was the root of that joy? Looking back on it now, I would have to say that the root of that joy was the entering into a new relationship, a relationship that would have its ups and its downs, a relationship that would be both intimate and unconditional, a relationship that would last throughout a lifetime, no longer, a relationship in which we would part of one another. That, and hope for the future. That is why we get together from far and near at special times of the year, like Christmas, to reunite, to restore and renew our relationships. I can hardly wait. Next Saturday Christina and Simon are coming and we get to meet Samson. Yet another relationship, and hope for the future of another generation.

What is at the root of joy? Relief. Healing. Reconciliation (restoring relationships). Etc. Etc. and at the root of it all – hope.

Commanding that there be joy just doesn't fit the situation, so why did Zephaniah need to command the people to rejoice? Perhaps the people had forgotten about the relationship, or perhaps they simply felt that they had been separated from, even abandoned by, or even worse that their behaviour was the cause of the rift between themselves and God. Zephaniah reassured them, "Rejoice... the Lord is in your midst." And as if that wasn't enough, Zephaniah went on to tell the people that, "the Lord your God in your midst [rejoices] over you with gladness, will renew you in his love." Zephaniah was affirming that the relationship was mutual; as much as they loved God, God too loved them and would "exult over [them] with loud singing, as on a day of festival."

In ten days time we will awaken and remember the story of God's coming into time and space, into history and into our lives in the baby Jesus. We will remember God's desire to be in relationship with us was so great that God took on human form. We will remember that God did not come into our lives with power and might, but with the weakness and vulnerability of a newborn babe. And we will remember the hope that we hold that we will one day be reunited. In the meantime, in anticipation of that day, we rejoice.