

3rd S. in Advent 12/12/21
Philippians 4:4-7 C

REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS; AGAIN I WILL SAY, REJOICE.

Well, we've reached the 3rd Sunday in Advent. We've gone from the purple candles to the pink candle on the Advent wreath because the 3rd Sunday in Advent is a little different from the other three Sundays in Advent. The other Sundays in Advent focus on repentance, turning from our sin. But, this Sunday is known as Gaudete. "Gaudete" is the Latin word that means "rejoice", and it gets its name from the words of Paul in our Epistle reading, REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS; AGAIN I WILL SAY, REJOICE. But honestly, this rejoicing business is a whole lot easier said than done. When Paul says, "Rejoice," he uses a present imperative, which is a fancy way of saying, that your rejoicing is to be an ongoing, continual, habitual action, regardless of your earthly, outward circumstances.

As you know all too well, when things are good, it's easy to rejoice. You know – when the sun is shining on you and you feel God is blessing you, like when you get that promotion or that raise at work; your retirement portfolio is rockin' way ahead of the market; the kids – and better yet, the grandkids – are coming home for Christmas; your team wins; the golf ball goes straight, then it's really easy to rejoice and have a good time and celebrate.

But, it's a whole lot harder to rejoice when things aren't going so well. It's hard to rejoice when the snow and cold come; the drought lingers; Covid, or cancer or some other disease of body or mind hits; your child doesn't want anything to do with you any day of the year, let alone at Christmas; the doctor looks you in the eye and says, "There's nothing more

we can do.” Then, you don’t find yourself rejoicing, but grumpy, angry, bitter, resentful, just plain sad.

So, what are we to do? There’s help and hope for us in John the Baptist.

In our Gospel this Sunday, John the Baptist is in prison. He’s in prison because he faithfully, without apology, proclaimed the Word of God, calling people to repentance, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 3:2). And, he proclaimed that message to all people.

St. Paul warns us, “the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (2 Tm 4:3). John didn’t adjust his Advent message to the whims of the culture of the day, to tell itching ears what they wanted to hear. He faithfully proclaimed God’s Word, to all without partiality, even calling King Herod to repentance for his adulterous relationship with his own brother’s wife. Think about this for a minute: John knew he was going to get in trouble for doing that. He’s in prison for doing what God asked him to do. And, as John is sitting in prison – not exactly a place of rejoicing -- the world is mocking him, making fun of him, hating him, because He did what God wanted him to do – **and He has doubts.** And, he’s got a pretty good sense of how this is all going to end – with the ending of his earthly life. And, in his doubts, he’s wondering, “Was all this worth it? Did I really do the right thing? Is this Jesus, the one that I have been preparing the way for, is He really the Promised Messiah or should we be looking for someone else?”

So, out of his wondering, out of his doubts, John sends two disciples to ask Jesus: “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another” (v. 19)? It’s a yes-or-no question. But, you know that Jesus, being Jesus,

doesn't give yes-or-no answers. He gives a Jesus answer to that question that goes like this:

“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by Me” (22-23).

That's the answer they brought back to John in prison. And when John heard that, He has reason to rejoice, to rejoice in the Lord always. With these words, Jesus is saying to John, “Rejoice. Be glad. I know you're in prison, not exactly the place where people rejoice, but you have reason to rejoice. Look at my works. Look at what I'm doing. The blind are seeing, the lame are walking, the lepers are being cleansed, the deaf are hearing, the dead are being raised up, and the poor are having good news preached to them. All that you said I would do, I'm doing it, John. I'm undoing the fall into sin in Eden's garden. I'm overcoming the curse of sin. I'm overcoming sin, death, and the devil. Don't be afraid, John. Rejoice, John, because that which is written in the Scriptures; that which you have proclaimed; that which you longed for is all coming to completion; it's all happening right here, right now – **in Me!**”

You have reason to rejoice, Dear Child of God, even though your life has its ups and downs. Even if it feels like you're riding a roller coaster every day. There's reason to rejoice, because that reason to rejoice is not based on an emotion or feeling, or the outward circumstances of your life today, that fact that today things are good. No, Dear Child of God, the reason for rejoicing is grounded and rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ -- what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do.

Look at what He has done. He won for you salvation of your body and soul. Jesus did that by living a perfect life for you, fulfilling all of God's

Commandments for you. And because you did not keep the Commandments perfectly, Jesus suffered the punishment you deserve for all your sins when He died on Calvary's cross. There, He shed His blood for you, that blood that cleanses you from all your sin. That is the blood that overcomes sin, death, and the devil. You can be sure and certain that He did it because He rose again on the 3rd day from the dead.

And He takes that forgiveness, that life, that salvation, that victory He won for you by His life, death, and resurrection, and He wrapped it all up in His Word; and the water and Word of your Baptism; and the bread and wine and the Word of Holy Communion, and delivered it to you so that its in your heart and in your life. And what sweet comfort that is because life has its ups and downs, the best of times and the worst of times, but the one constant you have in the joys and sorrows of your earthly days is Jesus Christ. And that is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And speaking of forever, Jesus will come again in glory on the last day and raise your body from the dust of the earth. On that most blessed of days, He will clothe you in a white robe, put a crown of life on your head, wipe every tear from your eyes, and seat you at His heavenly banquet table, at the feast that has no end.

So, here we are on the 3rd Sunday in Advent. Rejoice. Rejoice in the Lord always. And you, Dear Child of God, can rejoice and you do rejoice because the reason for your rejoicing is the person and work of Jesus Christ, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.