

Luke 1:24-45

After those days his [Zeccahria's] wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, "This is what the Lord has done for me in this time, when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

The word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Let us pray...

Oh God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight Oh God our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Last week, we acknowledged our weariness, and it seems almost easy... the list of things that are heavy to carry could go on, and on.

Very early on as the pandemic first made its way into the consciousness of The United States, my dad began to write daily prayers that he would send to friends and family, sometimes they were found and credited, or adapted and inspired and sometimes original.

He has tried to stop at least a couple times, but prayers still come, maybe not everyday but most.

This week he sent

A Prayer When Advent Is Challenging

God of our journey,
we enter Advent once again—
a time of waiting,
a time of anticipating,
a time of preparing.
We move toward Christmas—
a time of excitement,
a time of celebration,
a time of joy.
But God,

we do so in a broken and fearful world,
we do so carrying heavy burdens.
This can be a challenging season,
We weep for the
violence and harm
your children do to
one another and to your creation.
We chafe at
systemic injustice and oppression
that deny full life to all.
We grieve the deaths
of family members,
of friends,
of colleagues.
We cope with illness
in our bodies and minds
and in the bodies and minds
of those we love.
We struggle
to cope with challenges of life
known only to ourselves
and shared with many.
Remind us, God,
that it is OK not to be OK,
it is OK not to have the "holiday spirit".
Remind us of your love for us
just as we are.
Remind us of your presence with us
however painful and challenging life may become.
Remind us that we can care for others
and allow others to care for us
and together make our way through this season and all seasons.

Grant us strength and grace
and all we need for the living of these days.
We pray in the name of Jesus
who came among us as a tiny babe
to share our life
in joy and sorrow,
despair and promise
death and new birth.
Amen.

It is in the midst of all the stuff, all the mess, all the reality of our lives
where we can still find joy in our connections.

In our text from the gospel according to Luke for today we find a moment of
Joy, more than just a moment really.

We find two women, a family, cousins who share a similar condition,
bringing new life into the world.

As a male, I will not personally know what it is like to be pregnant, but there
is certainly a deep and intimate connection between mother and child
through gestation, a connection that will remain a bit mysterious to me, and
a connection that lasts beyond birth, that begins to take shape while
humans are beginning to take shape.

Something that Mary, and Elizabeth could talk about, as they are in the
midst of a life changing journey, and these two women's children will be
world changers.

And though they have pregnancy in common, they have some common
ancestry, the commonalities begin to deviate. one old, one young, one
married, one unwed, yet they are connected and when Mary Calls out we
find a connection of joy between them.

As the reading reminds us:

“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

When have you experienced joy? Or witnessed someone experiencing Joy?

Some of you may be wondering about the turkey with the Santa hat who has joined me up here at the pulpit today.

This was picked up at grammies house, Essie’s maternal grandmother, Lucy’s great-grandmother, who we spent time with and visited for Thanksgiving in Oklahoma City as we do every year. We know that Essie’s papa purchased it well before Essie and I even met, and he passed away before Lucy was born

And because of the sheer amount of joy that it provides Lucy it no longer dances, but it can still [press] deck the halls.

And to this day, a giant smile, and her feet start pumping, arms go up, body spins around, and Lucy still dances.

Some of you saw this at the Social Justice and Mission committee Christmas party.

I will admit that it would be very annoying, if not for the connection I have to Lucy’s joy that radiates as she dances around.

The joy for those of us observing is because we know that papa would have been so tickled to see how much Lucy loves it,

And even though they never meant they are connected through family, and

now this turkey, as silly as that connection may be

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If you read through your presbytidings you would have seen A pre-Christmas reverie - by Joe Woodworth, a joy at wonders of nature that made him late for church... Perhaps that was a moment of joy as Joe connected with the colors that our creator painted in the sky.

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As one born and raised in Ohio, i know there is Joy in Columbus as the Columbus Crew won the Major League Soccer, MLS cup last night, and it is the connection to the city, the state, and the team and fanbase that celebrates and enhances the joy of athletic victory

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This past Friday, along with a couple of deacons, I visited one of our members at manzano del sol, we connected for conversation, for communion, and while it was maybe not for the purpose of joy, it brought me joy.

And I feel safe that I was not the only one who left that greeting joyful because of connections new and old.

We call comunion the joyful feast of the people of God, because in that meal we are connected to Christ we are connected to those in the room where we are and additionally with all those who have taken part in that ritual in this life, and all who dine at the heavenly banquet in the life to come.

In her book, Atlas of the Heart, researcher Brené Brown defines joy as “an intense feeling of deep spiritual connection, pleasure, and appreciation.” She says joy is “characterized by a connection with others, or with God, nature, or the universe.”

Joy, is about the connections we make. Connections to the sky that makes us late to church, connections that cause us to get up and dance, connections that caused JOhn the Baptist to leap in the womb, that brought Elizabeth and Mary to connections to the people in our neighborhood, our church, connections to people in our city, connections to nature, and even through video screens and phone calls.

Perhaps Joy, is knowing that we are connected with our creator, through a babe the child of mary, who is the word made flesh and connects our very humanity with our divine and transcendent God in a profound and mysterious way, that I may not fully understand, but I fully know is such a sign of compassion and love and connection of creator and created.

Joy can take so many forms. Not all of them are the same and not all of them may cause joy for everyone else around you, but all of them relate to how we connect with something, or someone else.

Like Elizabeth connecting with the child in her womb, with her cousin mary, with her lord being carried by her young cousin, joy is found in the connection.

I'll leave you all with another thought on Joy... it comes from the book of Joy, a book that chronicles conversations between Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Dali Lama.

"Joy is the reward, really, of seeking to give joy to others. When you show compassion, when you show caring, when you show love to others, do things for others, in a wonderful way you have a deep joy that you can get in no other way. You can't buy it with money. You can be the richest person on Earth, but if you care only about yourself, I can bet my bottom dollar you will not be happy and joyful. But when you are caring, compassionate, more concerned about the welfare of others than about your own, wonderfully, wonderfully, you suddenly feel a warm glow in your heart, because you have, in fact, wiped the tears from the eyes of another."

Compassionate connection will not only bring about Joy for us, it will make the peace offered through Mary's baby a much needed reality .

So as we seek to rejoice in a weary world, we can seek joy, by seeking connections of all kinds, we can offer comfort, perhaps when we have a little extra joy in our proverbial tanks we can reach out and make ourselves available to provide connections to others.

Let us affirm our faith together.

We believe that joy is a sacred gift, existing on a plane deeper than happiness, stemming from the truth that we belong to God. We believe that joy is not meant for isolation. Joy is meant to be shared, weaving us together in laughter and in hope. And when joy feels impossibly out of reach, we believe that part of being sacred community is leaning on one another. So together we say: I will share my joy when yours runs out. You will share your joy when mine runs out. And in doing so, we will both see God. Amen.