

“Joy”

Isaiah 49:13; Luke 18:15-17;  
Luke 2:8-14

December 16, 2018  
Pastor Norman Fowler  
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

In some ways, we hardly need anything further in the way of a conversation about joy because we've experienced it. We've seen it this morning in the children's Christmas pageant. It's a wonderful thing to think about the children and the joy that they bring us. There's a particular joy, I think, when I see a child who is exuding joy. That joy is a wonderful thing.

As we think about joy, it's interesting to me that there is a way in which scripture invites us to experience and to think about joy. Oftentimes, when I think about scripture I don't think first about feelings. I think about understandings and ways of doing things. And yet, when the angels say they are bringing good news of great joy, they are inviting us into a feeling. Throughout scripture, often we are invited into a feeling, an experience that God wants us to have—an experience of joy.

As I think about it, I really should have done something different than a sermon. I probably should have written a poem that expressed joy, because how can you talk about joy? It really is something you express or engage with as a feeling, rather than something I can analyze. So what I was thinking about is why isn't my life more joyful? I wish I had a pageant in my life every day, and then maybe it would be more full of joy. And yet, it does feel like there is some kind of struggle to experience joy in life today. I was wondering about what that is.

I think one of the things that I've discovered is how, as I grew into adulthood, it felt like I was supposed to begin to question everything. The sixties taught us to question authority. Perhaps there's nothing wrong with questioning authority. It just feels like today I can't trust anything. What news can I trust? What if there had been a shepherd in that group who said, "I don't know that we can trust those apparitions we just saw." It feels to me like without trust, I can hardly enter in. If I'm always going to sit back and think, "I'm not going to take part in that. I'm not sure it's quite right," I feel like I miss the very joy of living. Yet in so many ways it feels like that's the life that I was brought up into, to be skeptical of everything.

Yet it is when I let go of all that, when I experience the joy of a pageant, when I experience the beauty of the sunset, when I enter into the very reality of the nature of things around me, that's when I really experience joy. There is joy in this coming, the coming of God among us, the very love of God come to be with us, God recognizing the world needs his son. God so loved the world that he sent his son. It is as I trust in God's coming, in God's love for us, that I can begin to recognize some joy that goes to great depths and takes me through some of life's sorrows.

Sometimes I have to let go of all my skepticism, all my worry about getting it just right, all my analysis, all the ways I make it about what I know and how I can solve things, and realize that maybe God is doing something and just accept that love, accept that grace, enter into it, and experience the joy. Amen.