



CAYMAN ISLANDS REGIONAL MISSION COUNCIL

WEEKLY UPDATE

December 13, 2023

SEASON OF ADVENT

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 49

UCJCI 42nd SYNOD THEME – **Rooted, Resilient: Responding in HOPE** (Health, Opportunity, Peace, Evangelism)

Advent 3 – JOY

Re-ignite with the Message of Joy

The Season of Advent reminds us of the importance of spiritual preparedness, of the readying of our hearts and minds for the life-transforming presence of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Ms. Amber Bothwell

On the 1st Sunday in Advent, we lit the candle of Hope in our churches as a reminder that as followers of Jesus Christ, we are the people of Hope.

Joy to the world! Merry Christmas! Happy New Year! Glad tidings, be of good cheer! 'Tis the season to be jolly, falalalalala-la-la! This time of year, there is no end of reminders that we are in the season of joy. Yet for so many people, this joy comes with a chaser of stress and guilt – with both bills coming due and diets starting anew in January. For others, the festivities are far from joyful, with more and more traditions and social gatherings added each year until they are merely stress-filled obligations. There is pressure to make the holidays as magical and perfect as the carefully staged versions we see on various screens. Gatherings of relatives end in family drama or are filled with heated conversations about “poli-tricks”, lamentations over rising crime and hand-wringing about the direction in which Cayman is going. This year, in particular, with the lingering issues surrounding COVID, the costs of inflation and the Holy Land itself burning in another tragic round of an ancient conflict, the revelry and excesses of the typical celebrations can seem like a grotesque mockery of the pain of much of the world. And for all of us, the merrymaking and fun of the season can seem shallow – even if we assuage our guilt through charity work and church attendance.

On the 2nd Sunday in Advent, we lit the candle of Peace as a reminder that we are the people of a special kind of Peace that transcends all understanding.

The 3rd candle today reminds us that we are also the people of joy. Joy is fundamentally different from happiness. Happiness is temporary, dependent on favourable circumstances and events that seldom last and can change quickly.

On the contrary, joy is a choice, a decision of our inner being, the recognition and appreciation of God’s presence in our lives, and the treasuring of our relationship with God. In addition, it is also the recognition of God’s many favours to us, the celebration of God’s goodness and love, forgiveness and mercy, God’s gifts, promises, and countless blessings.

Into this festive yet fraught time, we hear again the prophet Isaiah speaking powerfully to us in chapter 61:1–4, 8–11.

In our fallen world, almost everything is about chasing the promise of happiness somehow, and many lives are ruined directly or indirectly in its relentless pursuit. Let us remember not to fall into the same trap.

Let us also remember those who find it difficult to experience this joy because of their loss, suffering, or circumstances. Ours is the sacred duty not only to have but also to share this joy – and do so in a sensitive and meaningful way.

*“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”
(Philippians 4:4)*

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
² to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD
for the display of his splendor.



⁴ They will rebuild the ancient ruins
and restore the places long devastated;
they will renew the ruined cities
that have been devastated for generations.

⁸ “For I, the LORD, love justice;
I hate robbery and wrongdoing.
In my faithfulness I will reward my people
and make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹ Their descendants will be known among the nations
and their offspring among the peoples.
All who see them will acknowledge
that they are a people the LORD has blessed.”

¹⁰ I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

What an inspiring message! On this third Sunday of Advent, the Sunday focused on joy, let us explore together three ways these stirring words can re-ignite our faith.

1. Joy is of God.

The prophet’s soul ‘rejoices’ in response to God’s salvation and righteousness. His remedy for a ‘spirit of despair’ is ‘a garment of praise’. Gratitude to God and worship of God are the sources of his joy. But it is not enough to merely say that joy is a gift of God – though, of course, it is a gift. It is so much more powerful than that. Lest we forget, Galatians 5 tells us that joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit. And here we see that Isaiah’s bringer of good news is filled with the Holy Spirit and called out for a missional purpose – anointed and sent out to do God’s work. Indeed, this mighty prophecy has its fullest manifestation in the person of Jesus Christ, who declared to the people in the synagogue in Nazareth that He Himself was the fulfilment of these words. He did this following the Holy Spirit descending on Him at His baptism and, as Luke puts it, ‘in the power of the Spirit’.

Joy, then, is evidence of the active working of the Spirit of God in our lives. The prophet, in turn, sets out an active agenda: to seek out those at the margins of society, the oppressed and the depressed, and to offer transformation. He sets out to match his gifts of encouragement to each person’s specific need. To the captive, he brings freedom; to the brokenhearted, healing; to mourners, comfort; to victims of crime, an uncategorical commitment to justice. He does not offer unfeeling platitudes like ‘Cheer up!’ or ‘Every cloud has a silver lining.’ Instead, he makes each person know that they are seen and understood by God. Even the ‘oil of joy’ proffered to those who mourn probably is not just about cheerfulness or pleasure. Oil in the Old Testament was used as a cosmetic, and not using it was a sign of mourning, so giving someone oil could be a way of signalling that their period of grief and trouble is over. Oil also

fueled light-giving lamps; it signalled abundance and prosperity in food, and it was used for healing, honouring guests, and anointing priests and kings. Thus, in extending the ‘oil of joy’, the prophet is restoring dignity to a person brought low by adverse circumstances or their own transgressions. Similarly, Jesus at Christmas bestows on sinful humans the tremendous honour of becoming Immanuel, God-with-us, meeting us each in our particular circumstances, walking beside us and anointing us as fellow workers in the priesthood of all believers.

Here in Isaiah, we note that, after being anointed by God, the prophet goes forth to pour the ‘oil of joy’, this symbol of holy anointing, on other people. As in a relay race, this preacher of good news passes on his sense of mission, empowering the people to whom he ministers.

2. Joy is enabling.

Grief, stress and clinical depression can all be debilitating, leaving us feeling drained of strength. On the other hand, joy is paired with strength in the Scriptures: Nehemiah 8:10 tells us that ‘the joy of the Lord is your strength’, and 2 Chronicles 16 says that ‘strength and joy are in His dwelling place.’ Not leaner muscles, not great numbers, not monetary donations, but holy, God-granted joy is the source of our strength.

Isaiah’s prophet does not undertake the practical work of repairing the broken-down places himself. Verse four says that they – the recipients of the good news – ‘They will rebuild... and restore... they will renew.’ He proclaims, bestows, and comforts the people. They, in turn, go out to rebuild and renew, enabled by their newfound joy and optimism.

As we come to the close of 2023, we are bombarded with images of ruined buildings in Ukraine, Gaza and Israel. And we can all attest to situations of ruin and grief in individual lives closer to home as well – in a literal sense, to homes crumbling from neglect and a shortfall of funds, and metaphorically to lives broken by grief, crime, poverty or illness.

What a powerful witness then to proclaim that those ruins will be rebuilt. We Christians speak of joy, not because we ignore or belittle the real pain that many people are going through. Rather, we testify that God is at work! God has not abandoned the places of ruin, even if the situation of devastation has remained for months, years or even ‘generations’. We testify that ‘weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning’ (Psalm 30:5) – even if that night is a metaphor for an extended period of time.

Jesus declared that he had come to bring the Good News, and he also came to heal the sick, give sight to the blind and feed the multitudes, giving them the tools to return to work. Once we have accepted his ‘oil of joy’ and ‘garment of praise’, it is our turn to act. Enabled by the spiritual renewal He gives us, we must turn to the work of restoring, rebuilding and renewing. For situations – such as faraway wars – where we cannot ourselves rebuild, we can pray, without ceasing, for those Christians (and non-Christians) whom God has commissioned to do that work.

3. Joy is communal.

It is not selfish or self-serving; it is outward-looking. The Scripture suggests that the prophetic joy-giver has planted seeds

that will sprout and grow until 'all nations' share in salvation. The stirring and inspiring picture of joy painted in this passage is not about individual success, satisfaction, or pleasure but about the lifting up of the entire community – the whole world even!

Imagine the powerful testimony to our communities if every Christian spoke confident words of optimism such as those featured here. The prophet is not deluded. He knows that people are grieving. He recognizes that his target audience may have been victims of crime. They live in a desolate place, not for a short time, but for generations. Yet, in such dire situations, he boldly proclaims joy. And this is not a transient happiness, a moment of pleasure despite pain, a silver lining on the storm clouds. No, this is an empowering, Spirit-filled anointing in which oppression, victimization and injustice are transformed.

This Christmas, let us accept the good news of Jesus' birth for ourselves first. Then, in imitation of Christ, let us go forth to truly see those around us, including the marginalized and the oppressed. Let us respond sensitively to their individual needs and take up our assigned roles as re-builders and restorers. Let us liberally pour out the oil of God's joy, the assurance of God's justice and grace of God's salvation, so that all persons can be confident that they are, indeed, a people the Lord has blessed.

Please pray with me. Dear Lord, we delight and rejoice in You, for You have given us salvation. We ask You to transform those situations of devastation which we fear are hopeless. Re-ignite our faith and fill us anew with Your Holy Spirit, we pray, that we may truly bring glad tidings, tidings of comfort and joy, to all people. Amen.

The Advent Journey:

HOPE becomes Peace, **PEACE** becomes Joy, **JOY** becomes Love, **LOVE** becomes **CHRIST**

R. Schuller

**The Lord is coming,
always coming.**

**When you have ears to hear and eyes
to see, you will recognize Him at any
moment of your life.**

**Life is Advent; life is recognizing the
coming of the Lord.**

-

Henry Nouwen



**CAYMAN ISLANDS
REGIONAL MISSION
COUNCIL WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP**

**PATIENCE
IN THE
MIDST OF
CHALLENGES**

Speaker **REV. DONOVAN MYERS**


\$35

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 2024
TIME: 8AM - 10AM
VENUE: MORRITT'S, EAST END**

Remember in your prayers

All those God has placed on your heart and those brought to your attention in some way. Please also include in your prayers especially

- The bereaved
- The sick and ill
- Those going through a challenging time
- Those before an important decision
- Those needing guidance, support, or encouragement
- Those who feel lost and hopeless,
- Those caught in the middle of armed conflicts, persecuted, mistreated, exploited, disenfranchised, or abused.



on Radio Cayman 89.9
every Sunday at 7:45 am

**December 17, 2023
Ms. Amber Bothwell**

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