

2020

Advent Devotional

Week 3



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JOY

Week 3 - December 13, 2020

“Terrifying Joy”

Celebrating with Children

Prayer and Candle Lighting

Dear God, sometimes we find ourselves worried or unsure about what happens next. We know life changes all the time, but sometimes we would rather not change. We light the first two candles of Hope and Love and we remember the hope and love you give us all the time—even when things change. (Pause to light the first two purple/blue candles.) This week, we light the candle of Joy (light the pink candle) and we are reminded of the joy that can grow out of even the most uncertain times. We are grateful for your gifts of hope, love, and joy to us. Amen.

Read the scripture

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 - “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God...”

Activity

The Laughing Game: You will need one balloon, or feather, or even just a piece of paper the size of a sticky post-it note! Sit in a circle, but be sure to spread out at least arms distance from each other. Everyone must stay seated. One person will start with the item and throw it up in the air. The goal of this game is NOT to laugh as soon as the item touches the floor (don't even smile)... however, you HAVE to laugh as long as it is in the air. The first person throws the object up... everyone must laugh, and then... no more laughing, or smiling. You must put on your very serious face. Pass the item to the second person and it is the same object. Everyone must laugh, till it hits the floor.

Do this till everyone has a chance to throw the object, or twice around the circle. (If you are using a balloon, players may decide to bat at the balloon to keep it in the air and keep everyone laughing. However, as soon as it's out of reach to hit and it hit the floor: stone cold faces.) Do this at least enough times to realize the silliness of it all.

Closing Song: “Joy to the World”

<https://youtu.be/Y5LVkTS5nWc>

Bring the family together and offer a simple prayer. You may read the one here or offer your own. Feel free to do each section in any order.

Story Time:

Our story today is by Rev. Lisa Petty. Click [HERE \(https://youtu.be/ZkPQwKDoUNg\)](https://youtu.be/ZkPQwKDoUNg) or read the following:

After I completed 5th grade, my family moved from our home in Pasadena to San Diego. Though this was only a two-hour car ride, it was terrifying for me. I was a somewhat shy kid, especially around new people. Moving was not my idea of adventure. Going into junior high school meant that I was now eligible to go to ‘UMYF’, United Methodist Youth Fellowship... “Youth group.” Before we moved to this new town and church, the youth from the new church sent a letter with a few pictures in it... pictures with names and faces doing fun activities.

This was exciting and terrifying. I was not sure I wanted to make any new friends, and also I wasn't sure I would fit in, or if anyone in my new town would like me. Though shy, I really liked people and I really wanted others to like me.

I remember nights that I just cried and cried because I was so upset to be leaving the small group of friends I had. I remember thinking that no one could ever possibly understand the hurt I was feeling. Every time I thought of leaving I got very upset.

Once we moved, I started attending youth group each week and some of the kids were actually interested in being friends with me. I learned their names and faces from the pictures and then met them face to face. We exchanged phone numbers, talked on the phone, met up during the week after school or on weekends. I felt like people actually wanted to be friends with me. They liked me for me!

Even though I was terrified to move just two hours away, it ended up being one of the best things that has happened in my life. It took a little bit of time to see it, but within the first year I was so thankful to have moved and found lifelong friends in a church community. This was terrifying...and also in a short time, joyful.

Joy did not happen overnight, but it did happen over many nights, little by little, it crept in and I knew I was opening up to learn more about myself and about God.

Discussion Questions

- What is something that sounds really scary, but might actually be kinda fun?
- When have you been afraid to do something, but tried it anyway? How was that experience?
- What are you afraid of today, and how might this turn out to be a good thing that reveals God's love to you?

Week 3 - December 13, 2020

“Terrifying Joy”

JOY

Celebrating alone, with youth and/or adults

Set aside time alone, or together, online, or on a phone call, and offer a simple prayer. You may read the one here, or offer your own. Feel free to do each section in any order.

Prayer and Candle Lighting:

Dear God, we come to this third week in Advent waiting for your Joy. Sometimes it is the middle of hardship, your joy is evasive. Let us be still and look for it: in the sunrise, in the sunset; in the songs of birds or the noises of beloved pets; in the faces of those we love, we look at in pictures and the faces of those we have told ‘goodbye’. Remind us that your joy comes in many forms. Let us search till we find it. As we light the first candle, we remember how God brought us out of darkness. The hope of this light is that God is coming in Jesus Christ. (Pause while the first purple/blue candle is lit). As we light the second candle, we remember God’s love - that Christ would come to be with us because God first loved us. As we light this candle of Love, may the light that shines God’s love upon us allow us to shine the light of love to one another. (Pause while the second purple/blue candle is lit). As we light the third candle, we remember our God who is the author of joy - the deep beautiful and sometimes hard fought joy of this life and in the life of Jesus. As we light this candle of Joy, may we search diligently for the joy God brings us. (Pause while the pink candle is lit). Amen.

Read the scripture: Isaiah 64:1

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence...”

Expanded scripture: [Isaiah 64: 1-9](#)

Sing: “Joy to the World”

<https://youtu.be/Y5LVkTS5nWc>

This week’s message is by Rev. Lisa Petty. You can watch her read it [HERE](#)
(Link: https://youtu.be/33Ne1X_d8Tc)

“Ok...you are given a two word mantra. Two words to describe your mission or who you are. What would they be...?” This was posted on a social media page a few weeks ago. It was intriguing enough it made me pause and start thinking about what mine would be.

As I paused, I started thinking about my work and my personal life, and the culmination of the two trying to come up with this tiny mantra. It took me exactly one minute to start crying. Everything I started thinking of wasn’t really true at the moment. While the big picture mantra of my life seems to be “Find Joy,” more fitting for this year and in this moment is “Keep Going.” While currently more accurate, it just seems like an utter failure of a mantra.

I would love to say I am naturally optimistic, easy going, flexible, and ready for anything... but on my good days I am a realist, with some bend and ready for only what I can see coming. During this pandemic I try my best to hold this up for all to see, even on days when I feel completely hopeless, rigid, and want to look in the rearview mirror more than at the road ahead.

“Keep Going” seemed more realistic. While it is not overly positive, it is honest and it is a momentum that propels me forward (a direction that is hard to want to go some days). As someone who suffers from depression, I have fought for my joy more than most people really know. With what others call my “naturally bubbly personality,” most people don’t know that I fight for my joy on a daily basis, and that in this time being away from close friends and family, I feel like I am clawing my way to joy each week.

I sit at the end of the day and look back to see where I may have missed joy because I was too busy, or where I can find joy in the simple breath of life, or the smiles of my kids or the shelter over my head. Sometimes joy is something we have to work at.

Our alternate scripture from Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God” Imagine that: to rejoice in ALL circumstances. The only way I am able to find any pieces of joy and rejoicing some days, is to remember that Christ, too, was human. He started as a baby; before he was anything else to anyone else, he was just a baby, a son to a mother and stepdad. When I cannot think of anything to rejoice in, or anything to feel joy in, I think of the human emotions that Christ too must have felt. I wonder if he ever had days when he wanted to give up, or yell at his parents or later at the disciples. I believe he had more than his fair share of days when he put his head in his hands and wept.

When I have these days, I let myself cry. And then, I remember my most accurate mantras... both the one I strive for and the one I can accurately rely on: *“Find Joy” and “Keep Going.” For in all circumstances, even hard ones, we can find joy.*

Discussion Questions:

What would your two-word mantra be for your life?

Would you prefer a different one for this current moment we’re in?

Do you have many days when you have to work to find your joy?

Does it bring you any comfort to remember that Jesus was human, just like us?

What joy can you bring to others today? Consider leaving a love note or a thank you note for someone to find.

Closing Prayer

O God, help us take the time to notice the small things that are evidence of your love for us. Help us to rejoice in all circumstances, even those which we dislike. Remind us that when things are difficult, you are present with us, encouraging us on this journey. Help us to find joy. Amen.



Additional options

You might want to keep a simple journal during this Advent season. Below are some suggested prompts that coincide with this week's theme and stories. Read ahead a day or two as some days require a bit of homework.

Week 3 Journal Questions:

- Day 1. Looking back at last week, were there days when it was really hard to feel Joy? What was it that stole your joy? Make a promise to yourself to find joy in tomorrow.
- Day 2. Were you able to find a joy in today? Is it easier to find joy in remembering past events or in thinking of good times to come? Which is more helpful to cling to as a tool to ignite joy in your day?
- Day 3. Try to think of someone today who really needs some joy in their life. How can you help them. Make a plan for tomorrow to share some joy with them.
- Day 4. What Christmas decoration in your house gives you the most joy? Why?
- Day 5. What Christmas television show gives you the most joy? Why? Watch it again.
- Day 6. What Christmas song brings you joy whenever you hear it? Why? Play it or sing it again.
- Day 7. Looking back over your weeks journaling, what did you learn about joy? What surprised you? How can you incorporate that knowledge into living more joyfully?