

One Sunday morning during Advent a few years ago,
one of the students came up to me before Bible class and said,
“I have a really dumb question. Why is one of the candles on that wreath
PINK instead of blue?”

She noticed! Did you? Have you ever wondered about that?

If so, here is the answer:
the third candle is a brighter COLOR
because it has a brighter THEME!

In the midst of this sober season of Advent comes a Sunday of special JOY.

Here’s the deal:
The Lord who CAME at Christmas is COMING AGAIN!
That can make a lot of difference in how we live, can’t it?

Two weeks ago, the sermon asked:
“When He comes, where will we be LOOKING?”

Last Sunday, it was:
“When He comes, what will we be DOING?”

Today, we finish this series with an ATTITUDE check:
“When He comes, how will we be FEELING?”

The third candle is a call to JOY, announced in the READINGS appointed for today.

The Prophet Zephaniah says it with synonyms:
“**Sing... shout aloud... be glad...Rejoice with all your heart!**”

The familiar Epistle Lesson from Philippians 4 prefers simple repetition.
Listen in:

READ THE TEXT

REJOICE!

Even the most worldly of our neighbors knows that this is “the season to be jolly”
So...are we?

Or is the month of December “the season to be frantic”?

Frantic shopping trips, frantic rushed rehearsals for Christmas programs,
frantic baking, frantic wrapping?

For many, this time of year is simply bittersweet – joy is stirred together with grief.

I think of families with sons or daughters in Afghanistan,
or the man laid off from his job at Intel,
or the couple who lost their home in a foreclosure.

To frantic people and to those who grieve and to all of us, Paul says, “REJOICE”

and then he adds, “ALWAYS!”

This joy of ours is not a box marked “Do not open till Christmas”
and then, as soon as the holiday is over,
tucked away with the other decorations in the basement!

It’s to be a permanent posture – a way of life.

C. S. Lewis once wrote:

“Every Christian is commanded to be as happy as He can...all the time!”

Commanded?

Can joy be commanded?

With life the way it is, how can that be possible?

I heard a story about a businessman whose wife had been ill for weeks.

One day he came home and asked her, as usual, how she’d been that day.
And as usual, she answered with a string of unhappy complaints.

For a while he listened in silence. Then he said abruptly,
“But tonight, for once, you must rejoice!”

“What?” she said. “You don’t understand how I feel.
Why are you telling me I must be JOYFUL? I can’t, I tell you.
I JUST CAN’T!”

“You can’t?” said her husband. “We’ll see about that!”
Then, taking a letter from his pocket, he thrust it before her face.
“This just came in the mail. Recognize the handwriting?”

At once a change came over the woman's face. She began to weep tears of JOY!

For the writing on the envelope was the handwriting of their oldest son,
whom they both believed to have been lost in the sinking of a fishing boat
many weeks before.

The letter told of his incredible survival at sea, and of an improbable rescue.
He was soon to come home!

Need I tell you that the rest of the night there was not another complaint from
her lips? Her body was still sick and sore, but her spirit had changed completely.

She had news that swallowed up her pains.

She had the NEARNESS OF HER SON, and it was the rebirth of JOY in her life.

We too have such news! And it is greater than our griefs and pains.
The LORD IS AT HAND!

Jesus, who died on a cross, is now ALIVE.
How can we be sad if we know THAT?

He who ascended to the Father will come again for us.
How can we be sad if we know THAT?

And He will bring with him those dear ones we miss – those who have “fallen
asleep” in faith. They are safe with Him, and he will bring them with Him
when he comes again.
How can we be sad if we know THAT?

That is why, when Paul says, “REJOICE!” he does NOT say
“Rejoice in your constantly good health”
nor
“Rejoice in your ample bank account”
not
“Rejoice because everyone likes you”

but rather, “REJOICE IN THE LORD!”

He is not far away, but VERY NEAR to you...
as near as the water of BAPTISM on your head
as near as the Holy Communion in your mouth
as near as the words of Good News in your ears

as near as the neighbor in whom Christ comes to us and says,
“You have done it unto me.”

NEAR He is with forgiveness and healing and hope.

So... why aren't we more joyful?

I heard a pastor years ago talk to our conference about the
“JOY KILLERS” in our lives.

He challenged us to name them. If you were given that assignment, what would you list as your personal “JOY KILLERS”? (Do that now in the column on the left...)

I wonder what you wrote. Did you name a PERSON who kills your joy?
A situation? A coming appointment?

One of my joy killers is WORRY.

Paul mentions it here in these verses: **“Have no anxiety about anything”**

Ah, but I DO! And so do you!

And our worries go to work like BEAVERS,
chewing away at the solid timbers of our faith, making ever larger holes
until the house of JOY collapses.

It is not enough that JOY is given to us.

JOY Needs PROTECTING from the anxiety that hovers constantly over
our shoulders.

So Paul gives us his prescription:

**Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and
supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.**

In other words:

WORRY ABOUT NOTHING. PRAY ABOUT EVERYTHING.

For it is in prayer that we stop. And remember. And see again
what we had lost sight of.

Think, for example, of a man who has lost his glasses.

He looks everywhere – on the dresser, the kitchen table, the bathroom sink,
the front seat of the car.

“Where ARE they?” he howls in desperation.
Until his little daughter wrinkles her nose at him and says,
“Silly daddy, you got your glasses ON!”

How very foolish he feels!

Silly daddy! Not to see what is right before his eyes...

But no sillier than we, having the love of Jesus placed before our eyes,
grow blinded by the crush of daily troubles and the accumulation of irritations,
and lose sight of Him.

So Paul advises:

**“But in everything, with thanksgiving, let your requests
be made known to God”**

IN EVERYTHING.

How many of the Joy Killers on your list have you made the subject of your prayers?

WITH THANKSGIVING.

How recently have you stopped to “count your blessings” (as old song says)
and give thanks for them? (Please do that now in the column at right)

Did you remember the blessings NO ONE CAN TAKE AWAY?
Forgiveness for all sins?
A place prepared in heaven?

It is in such moments when we find our “spiritual glasses”
and have our sight and our joy restored.

What a Treasure!
And God intends to guard it, so that He might find you
JOYFUL WHEN HE COMES!

In many ancient stories,
there are great treasures stored in secret places.

Almost invariably, those who stored the treasures placed some guardian nearby.
Perhaps a DRAGON to sleep atop a pile of gold
Or a pair of LIONS to guard the door.

Your JOY is a treasure God means to guard so that no one takes it from you.

To that end He makes a promise that I repeat at the end of many a sermon:
**And the peace of God, which passes all understanding,
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

NOT lions! NOT dragons!

NOT with anything on the OUTSIDE, but rather with something on the INSIDE
does He guard us...

A PEACE.

A PEACE ONLY HE CAN GIVE.

A PEACE that makes no sense to some people – that “passes
understanding.” – A PEACE that floats like a boat on the sea of troubles
that surround us.

A PEACE that springs from knowing that Jesus Christ is NEAR to us,
and coming NEARER all the time.

So today, we lit a brighter candle – a pink one.

A candle that reminds us to be JOYFUL WHEN HE COMES.

Now may the peace of God,

which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in CJ.