

Advent 4, 2015  
Faith Through the Pain  
St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, OR  
By Rev. Mr. William Baker

*“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. (Philippians 4:4)*

Here we are at the end of Advent, a time of great anticipation, eager expectation...a time of acknowledging the sin that dominates mankind and the need for a way out of our miserable situation. And we celebrate that ‘way out’ in the Incarnate Son that came into the world to conquer a depravity that would have doomed mankind for eternity. Thanks be to God, we have much to celebrate! This is why, even in the penitent nature of Advent, we experience the Love, the Hope, the Joy and the Peace that we have talked so much about over the last few weeks. Yes, we come as sinners, but not just sinners...we come as repentant sinners knowing, that through the Incarnation, we have been given complete forgiveness through Jesus Christ...a way out...a way to eternal life.

Advent...a time of looking forward to the Incarnation, Yes; but also a time many reflect on lives, not only lived in the service of our Lord, but lives in conflict with the world around them. And this is where so many get caught up this time of year and forget their own freedom found in Jesus Christ. A time when many forget that the Love of Jesus Christ will...conquer all. *“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.” (Philippians 4:4)* The words of St. Paul this morning show us the way out of what is often characterized as a stressful season.

But let's not deceive ourselves; life in this world consists of a great accumulation of heavenly gifts as well as evil transgressions, and everything in between. As we have each been encountering this Advent season I have been privileged to be in the confidence of many and learn that this ‘most wonderful time of the year’ isn't always so wonderful for some. Some reflect on loved ones no longer with us to carry on those old Christmas traditions. For some it is the guilt in knowing of those in need and having no ability to help (some within their own families). There are relationships in turmoil instead of the love that is suppose to surround us this time of year. And, of course, there is the simple stress

of a heavy workload that dulls the Christmas spirit. Take heart, this is the most 'wonderful' time of the year...but for some it can be hard to notice.

And I am sure, in our own ways, we can all relate to these sediments. Anxieties, depression, fear...loss, are all normal aspects of being human in an imperfect world. We could dwell there as many do, but our Lord has another way for Christians to see the world if we are only willing to look toward Him.

The Psalmist writes in Psalm 33, *"Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous; for it becometh well the just to be thankful. Praise the Lord with harp; sing praises unto him with the lute, an instrument of ten strings. Sing unto the Lord a new song; sing praises lustily unto him with a good courage. For the word of the Lord is true; and all his works are faithful. By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. He gathereth the waters of the sea together, as it were upon an heap; and layeth up the deep, as in a treasure house. Let all the earth fear the Lord: stand in awe of him all ye that dwell in the world. For he spake it, and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast."* (psalm 33: 1- 9)

In spite of the chaos we see in the world today, in spite of the sorrows we have had to endure, in spite of the sins that have taken us victim...let us remember that God is very much in control and has already saved us from the flood. He has already sealed us safely inside the Ark of Salvation...he has forgiven us and counted us as righteous. If we focus on the reality of this life as a vapor that relinquishes itself to eternal life where the ultimate expression of Love conquers all...then...then we can find that peace which we seek even in a fallen world...peace and love within our personal sorrows and anxieties. The world wants to drain from us any semblance of a happy and content life, but God wants us to experience joy and happiness, love and peace. By keeping our hearts and minds focused on Jesus Christ we will overcome the dark skies and see the true light...and our pain will be pacified.

So, as we have looked at the love, the hope and the joy that have come into the world through the Incarnated Son, may we rejoice in the peace within; that comfort inside each of us where Christ dwells sharing our pain and strengthening our commitment to Him.

*Happy are they, saith the scriptures, that continue to the end. Be faithful, saith God, Until death, and I will give thee a crown of life. Again he saith in another place: He that putteth his hand to the plough, and looketh back, is not meet for the kingdom of God. Therefore let us be strong, steadfast, and unmovable, abounding always in the works of the Lord. Let us receive Christ, not for a time, but for ever; let us believe his word, not for a time, but forever; let us become his servants, not for a time, but forever; in consideration that he has redeemed and saved us, not for a time, but forever, and will receive us into his heavenly kingdom, there to reign with him, not for a time, but forever. (Book of Homilies pg. 296)*

We, as Christians, are in a unique position from which to be happy this morning and forever. We have a Saviour who loves us enough to become one of us. We have a Saviour who experienced our pain and reigns over the battles we fight. We have a Saviour who overcame death, paving the way for us into eternal life. We have a Saviour who lives inside our hearts, the Holy Spirit who brings us the comfort we find in the love of Jesus Christ. The world will do its best to tear us down, to remove our hope but, in this season of Advent and beyond let us be always reminded that our salvation comes through the incarnation of a God who knows and understands our hearts. He dwells in us and we in Him not just for today but forever.

*“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”*  
(John 14:27)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.