

Advent Sermon on Joy (2020)

John R. Collins

Scriptures: Romans 15:7-13 (NRSV), Psalm 16 (NRSV)

Draft 6 of Saturday, December 19, 2020

Last week we lit the third candle, the candle for Joy. In place of the sermon we had the Children and Youth christmas pageant, which was great. I had an excuse not to preach on joy and I almost took it, because I wasn't sure how to preach on joy (I'm still not sure).

In the end I decided to preach on joy this week and focus on love (the theme for the fourth candle) on Christmas Eve, because Joy is an important, and often overlooked, aspect of the Christian life. To that end I've come up with five things I think you need to know about joy.

1. The Bible talks about joy and happiness a lot. Biblically speaking, the words are interchangeable. Perhaps the most relevant passage for joy this season is one we read every Christmas: Luke 2:8-10 (NRSV) in which an angel and the glory of the Lord shone all around them and they were terrified, "but the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news [Gospel] of great joy for all the people.'"

2. Along with love, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self-control, the Apostle Paul lists joy as a fruit of the Spirit. That means that it's an outward indication that the Holy Spirit is at work within us.

3. Joy is not unique to Christians. The Lord who makes the sun to rise on both the evil and on the good, and sends rain on both the righteous and on the unrighteous has made happiness a common good of both Christians and non-Christians alike. We share with non-Christians the ordinary, everyday sources of happiness in our lives.

All people know joy and happiness. All people long for happiness and are drawn to the experience of joy. It's human nature to seek out happiness. I think one of the main attractions of the Christian faith is that we have found a surer, more secure way to happiness, a more profound source of joy. As it says in Psalm 16, in the presence of God there is fullness of joy.

4. Being people of faith, people of joy doesn't mean we don't experience anger and sadness. I believe it would improve our witness to the world if Christians were known for being happy and joyful—but not if we're merely faking it.

5. Joy should be a big part of the Christian life. "Joy is the serious business of Heaven."
— Lewis, C. S.. *Letters to Malcolm, Chiefly on Prayer*. We can't manufacture it, but we can be open to it, we can be on the lookout for it.

In the words of the Apostle Paul, I pray that the God of hope will fill you with all joy and peace in believing. Amen.

Sources:

HarperCollins Bible Dictionary

New Interpreter's Bible Dictionary

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-happiness-different-from-joy>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/win-them-frowns/>