

Advent Devotional December 15, 2024

Weekly theme: Joy

Scripture

John 3:22-30

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized 24 — John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison.

25 Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. 26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him." 27 John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. 28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.' 29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease."

Devotion

The Rev. Amanda Horan '20

This passage holds a sense of loss, even as it speaks of joy. The author of the gospel carefully points out that John will soon lose his freedom. Those of us who know the story also know that he will soon lose his life. His work is coming to an end, just as Jesus' ministry gets underway. John's disciples seem to sense that something is about to change. They are touchy and sensitive; protective of their teacher's work. And who can blame them? They love him. And they love their shared ministry.

Even during this joyful season, many of us do not feel like raising our voices to sing out the words of the old carol "Joy to the World, the Lord is Come!" It is a lonely feeling to approach Christmas while also experiencing the grief of loss.

The truth is, life is usually a pretty messy business. Things like joy and loss don't often stay in their carefully designated times and places. They mingle and collide. Our happy memories and the legacy of meaningful work and loving relationships live on for us even as we feel the sting of a hard ending.

Perhaps this passage may be an invitation to us who have been stretched thin by the pull between grief and joy. Maybe we find here an invitation to take time to name the something or the someone we miss. Maybe here is an invitation to decide not to put on the mask of easy holiday happiness. Instead, like John, may we seek out the wisdom of honest joy. John does not let the sting of a hard ending prevent him from honoring the legacy of his work within the larger story of God's love for the world. He does not let loss steal his joy. May it be so for all of us.

Prayer

Help us, O God, to embrace this season with a heart that can hold both joy and sorrow. May we find solace in the truth that your presence is with us in all things. Let our hearts be both open and honest, ready to receive and to share the fullness of your joy. Amen.