

## Third Sunday of Advent B, 2014

Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

On our wedding day, Judy and I kept the tradition of the groom not seeing the bride until she began walking down the aisle. When I saw her, at first silhouetted by the light coming in from the door of the Church and then radiant and beautiful as she stepped into the building I was awestruck. I believed I was the luckiest man alive and I was filled with a joy that I don't think I had felt before. How did I react to this overwhelming feeling that my heart might just burst?

I smiled, stood up straighter and re-tasted just a little bit more of my breakfast than was comfortable. Then I got on with the business of getting married.

It was the first time I consciously realized that there can be a disconnect between the feeling of immense joy and the action of rejoicing. It seems I failed in that moment to express my joy, but I never failed to remember it or to experience it again in our union.

And I know that we have all had events that brought us overwhelming joy

- Joyfulness, as children likely caused us to jump and clap, but what about
- our first love, or our first kiss
- the birth of a child

I'm willing to bet that the majority of us as adults did not jump, clap or dance. It is tempting to say that we kept a bit more decorum because there are some unwritten rules in our society against too much expression, but I don't think that is the whole answer.

Our first loves, our graduations, or our weddings, our becoming parents, while joyful events, also come with fear. Fear of the new, fear of the unknown, fear of failing and that odd fear that we won't be able to sustain the joy... that this is the peak, and it might be downhill from now on.

An honest review of these events in our later years may show us that some of our fears were justified, but certainly not all of them. Not even the majority.

(Pause)

Today we celebrate Gaudete Sunday, a word that means rejoice. And while each of us is unique in our experiences, our successes and our failures, we are reminded that we have a common denominator in what we believe and in whom we believe.

And our scriptures point not just to joy, but to the action of rejoicing:

**(Isaiah) I rejoice heartily in the LORD, in my God is the joy of my soul**

**(Mary) my spirit rejoices in God my Savior**

**(Paul) Rejoice always!**

Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, they expound the reasons that those who belong to God 'have' for rejoicing.

There is healing for the brokenhearted, freedom for those held captive to sin. God has lifted up the poor and has shown His justice. He has sent His Son to be one of us, to be in solidarity with us, to stand with us in all things... but sin.

And throughout many of our experiences, we can look back and see God's hand, not only in our deliverance in getting through a tough time,

but in what He has done to redeem us in and through those trials. How He has put people or events in our lives to lift us up from disappointment and despair, even from the pits of Hell. Our personal histories tell us this is true and that there is reason to rejoice.

But this day is even more, is bigger than our personal experiences. It speaks to hope and the peace that comes with knowing... knowing that God keeps His promises.

John the Baptist points to the Promised Christ, Emmanuel which means - God is With Us. And God is with us both in history, and in the now. And if that is true, then there is no reason to believe He will not be with us in the tomorrow. Right?

**And that is reason enough to raise our hands and our hearts and our voices to God rejoicing in what God has done, is doing and will do. And if ever there was a safe and proper place to do so, it is here.**

There should be no disconnect between joy and rejoicing. No gesture of praise and joy is too small or too grand for the God who has given all for us so that we might have life... and have it abundantly!

Christ has come and is coming again and He has defeated sin and death and banished fear. How many times has He said to us - Do not be afraid -?

Is there still an element of the unknown in trusting God? Yes. Do not be afraid. Rejoice in the possibilities.

Is there a chance that in our sinfulness, we will throw the occasional wrench in God's plan for us?- probably. Do not be afraid. Rejoice in God's mercy and faithfulness.

Is there any reason to believe this is as good as it is going to get? - no. Do not be afraid. Praise God... He keeps His promises.