

## **ENCOURAGING WORD FOR TROUBLING TIMES #139** (by Rev. Dr. Alice Wolfe, 12/8/20)

### **“Finding Joy this Christmas”**

This year, the holidays likely will not be what most of us had planned. Loved ones have died, dreams have died, many are sick, healthcare workers are overextended, some have less or no income, and few (if any) of us will celebrate Christmas like “normal.” How can we celebrate the joy of Christmas when we feel like being anything but thankful or joyous?

**Don’t dread the holidays.** When we dread the holidays, we worry and stress about them and ruin today. Try to remember what Jesus said in *Mat. 6:34*, **“Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”** Don’t ruin today by worrying about tomorrow. If you do, you ruin today and tomorrow. Instead, make the most of today, and deal with tomorrow when you get there—but not before.

**Choose to give thanks.** Even though you may not feel like it, choose to be thankful. God tells us to **“give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thes. 5:18)**. God doesn’t say “Give thanks if you feel like it or when things are going well” but “in *all* circumstances.” Why? Because when we give thanks to God, it helps us feel better and focus on our blessings instead of our burdens. So, give thanks to God for the time you had with your loved one, for the good times you shared, and for the wonderful memories you made. You can choose to be grumpy and make yourself and others around you miserable, or you can choose to be thankful and be an inspiration to your family and those around you. It’s your choice.

**Give yourself time to grieve.** Life is busy, and the holidays are often even busier; it’s hard to find time for anything extra. However, if you want to survive (and hopefully enjoy) the holidays, set aside some time to allow yourself to grieve—even if it is just a few minutes a day or ten minutes a week. Block out some time in your schedule to visit the cemetery, look at old photos or videos, take a walk or just sit and remember the good times you shared, talk with a friend, or just sit and pray. If you try to hold your grief in, it will come out eventually—but usually in messier and less than convenient settings. But regardless of when it comes out, let it out. It’s O.K. to cry (even Jesus cried); it just shows that you love and miss your loved one—and that’s a good thing! It’s also O.K. (and healthy) to grieve other losses this year and this season. Many of us may be grieving that we won’t get to gather with our extended family for Christmas this year, but we can rejoice that we still have them!

**Give yourself permission to do something different.** Some people find great comfort in continuing the family traditions after loved ones have died, but others find it difficult. Do what is best for you and your family. If it is comforting to continue the family traditions, then do that. But if it is more comforting to start some new traditions, then try something new! If you won’t get to be with your family this year, then perhaps you could call them or video-chat. You can thank God for the family traditions that have meant so much to you in the past, and you can find new ways to make this Christmas special for you and your family. And to make the holidays even more special, find a way to serve or show kindness to others. The blessing you give them will bless you, too!

**Look for the “holy” in the holidays (holy-days).** Take comfort in knowing that God loves you so much, He left His throne in heaven above to enter this world as the baby Jesus (Emmanuel, “God with us”) so He could be with you. (This is why we celebrate Christmas—the birth of Jesus, God coming to be with us.) God, the Holy One, is with you during this challenging time; give yourself time to connect with Him. Remember and rejoice that if we and our loved ones have accepted God’s gifts of love, forgiveness, and life through Jesus Christ, this world is not all there is; we will see our loved ones again! Though the temporary separation is heart-breaking, the eternal reunion will be heart-warming and heart-healing. And if your loved ones are still here but you won’t be able to be with them, rejoice and give thanks for the ways they have blessed your life—and look forward to when you can be with them again! With God’s help, we can survive the holidays—and even enjoy them! I’m praying for you!

**PRAYER:**

Loving God, help me grieve my losses... and thank you for all my blessings... especially Jesus... Help me to remember that you are with me and will never, ever leave me. Help me to find the Holy (you) in this holiday season. Help me to let you be born anew in me this Christmas, and help me to live in such a way that everyone sees and gets to know you! How do you want me to be a blessing to others...? Amen.