

**Sermon, December 12, 2021**  
*Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 2:2-14*  
**“The Angels Proclaim: Joy”**  
**Rev. Dr. Brian Jones, Senior Pastor**



Today we will have, after the second service our second new members class. I'm so excited about this class, the wonderful people who are entering a deeper relationship with all of us in the family of God. And I love having these classes because they give me an opportunity to share more about the United Methodist Church, and the joy I have in serving as a United Methodist clergy.

Not that it's always easy. Any ministry comes with its own unique set of challenges. You have them as do I. One of the challenges that we United Methodist clergy often face is the experience of living in the church parsonage. Now, I admit we have been incredibly fortunate over the years and have lived in some lovely homes including the one we live in now. We are blessed and privileged to do so.

Not that our homes haven't at times come with challenges. In one of our homes, we began to have some issues with plumbing. In particular in the kitchen, and when we began to experience some odd horrible something coming up in the dishwasher after we used it.

The Trustees couldn't figure it out, and eventually they got a plumber to come in. After he did a survey, he said *I know what the problem is. Several years ago they hooked this house to city water and the septic*

*system And then they crushed the old septic tank. But what they didn't know was there was another septic tank still attached to the house. So there was water in the septic tank that had nowhere to go. But it's an easy fix. He said there is a pipe in the basement, and once that pipe is opened just a little to relieve the pressure, then it'll be fine, and we can close off the tank from the house and get it crushed. It will be fine.*

And so that's what he did. The young man went into the basement, found the pipe and the nut holding the cap on. He took his wrench, and although it was stubborn, he finally got the cap loosened enough to relieve the pressure.

Well, sort of. Do any of you remember these toys. It's a rocket you would fill with water and then pump air into it to create pressure, and then you would hit the trigger, the rocket would fly into the air and spray everyone as it went up in the air. I hope you can see where I am going with this. Imagine the rocket laying on its side rather than pointing up in the air. Can you see where we are going without hearing details?

The earnest young man cracked the nut on that cap. What happened next probably went down in the annals of bad plumbing decisions. I hear the plumber still wakes up every now and then in a cold sweat reliving the nightmare. As I said, I am doing my best to spare you any graphic descriptions. Let me just say, it was a horrible, horrible idea. Lots of stuff got thrown away that day.

Now, the problem of course, was that the pressure built up because the pipe was clogged. And until that clog, the obstruction was removed, the water couldn't flow as it should.

When the water isn't flowing, when there's a clog, you have to be able to remove whatever it is that is obstructing, that is blocking the way, so that the water can flow freely. When there is something obstructing the way, it has to be removed.

I think that's a problem for a lot of people as we go deeper into the Advent season. There seems to be a lack of joy in so many people's lives. Which is terribly ironic, if you think about it. This is the season of joy. Joy to the world. We have decorations in our homes that say Joy, Christmas mugs, Joy. We have Christmas songs, both religious and secular. It just seems to be a really big deal, doesn't it? Almost as if when we celebrate the birth of the Son of God, the incarnation of the living God revealed in the flesh, that it ought to fill us with, well Joy.

And yet we have such a hard time, it seems, feeling that Joy. Have you ever found yourself just going through the motions, acting Joyful but deep down, you're just not feeling it? And it's not that you don't want to. It's not that you don't understand the importance of this season. And it's not that you don't believe, because you do. But sometimes, we just don't feel the joy. We feel disheartened more than anything else. What can we do to reclaim and experience the joy this season is supposed to bring us?

We are in the third week of Advent, and we have been looking specifically at the proclamations of the Angels throughout the Bible as they proclaim the Good News. In both of our Scriptures, the Gospel and Paul tell us we ought to have a heart of joy and rejoicing. But the problem is sometimes our hearts can get clogged up. Sometimes there are things in our life that will keep the joy we ought to be feeling from flowing.

So what are some of the things we can remove from our lives that will allow the joy to flow? Let me give you a few of the most prominent ones. One of the things keeping us from experiencing joy is a development of spiritual amnesia. When we allow the world to decide what the Christmas season is about, when we allow our souls to be bombarded with materialism, when we substitute things for relationships, when we, please forgive me, spend more time searching for bad news on TV radio and social media than reading our Bibles, we can forget why we celebrate. And that will obstruct your joy from flowing.

Might I suggest you take the time left in Advent, it's not too late, and use this time of preparation to rest your soul. Take the time to realize why the coming of Jesus is good news. Why the incarnation matters. All that God came to do and redeem our world even during the bad times. And you'll find the joy flowing again. Are you spending enough time in Advent praying, reading, celebrating the reason for our joy?

Busy-ness can clog up the flow of joy in your life. Sometimes, we can get so busy with getting things ready for Christmas, that we miss it altogether. Why, sometimes, we can get so busy going to Christmas parties, baking family dinners, buying presents, decorating, that we find ourselves exhausted by the time Christmas gets here. And it's not as if all the other things occupying your life don't also place demands on you. Look, the reality is, it's hard to sing Joy to The World while you are stifling a yawn.

This Advent season, let go of some of the busyness. Learn the incredible gift that you don't have to say yes to every single demand on your life and time. It's O to say no. It's OK to recharge. Whatever it is you do to catch your breath, I want you to do that. Take a walk. Read a book. Play a game with your kids and grandkids even when all of the decorations aren't up. Even if all of the baking isn't done. Because here is one of the great things about Christmas. As the Grinch himself finds out, you can't keep Christmas from coming. It will come, even if everything isn't ready. So if you only have one thing to get ready, shouldn't it be your heart. Catch your breath, and the joy will flow.

Regain the wonder. Traditions are important. But the danger with tradition is that we can find ourselves doing things by rote. We develop spiritual muscle memory and just go through Christmas.

Take some time this year and allow Advent to really be Advent. Regain the wonder of this season. I love that in the church year, this is where it starts, not New Year's Eve. As if the early church knew if we missed this, the birth of Jesus, the rest of the year would be off kilter. Re gain the wonder, hear what the angels proclaimed; Jesus is Good News. And may the joy flow in your life once more. Amen.

