

“Snoopy: Enjoy and Find Joy”

December 16, 2018

A *Charlie Brown Advent* series – Advent 3

Note: We’re grateful to Faith Church in Bellafonte, PA for the idea for this series.

It’s not uncommon to see an ad like this one. (Hold up Target ad with “Bring the joy”) And it’s typical this time of year to see “joy” connected to giving someone just the right gift. Maybe it’s kid’s toy - the newest, greatest, coolest thing. Or maybe it’s the new car with a bow on it sitting the driveway. Somehow we’ve connected joy with gifts – getting what we want. Maybe gifts bring happiness, but I’m not sure they bring joy.

We have Charlie Brown who’s seeking meaning in this season and sharing the journey with his friends. We have Lucy who grasps for control. And we have Snoopy – everyone’s favorite cartoon dog – who has been showing us happiness for years. If there’s one thing we can count on, it’s that Snoopy is happy most of the time.

We can count on Snoopy for finding enjoyment. Perhaps he’s the counterpart to Charlie Brown’s “Good Grief!” attitude. Now I’m not suggesting that Snoopy’s happy attitude is always where we should be. I’m not suggesting that we fake happiness, but there’s something about Snoopy’s perspective that challenges us.

Snoopy is the one who jumps into the holiday season full force, trying to win the prize for decorating. And we heard it when Charlie Brown read the flyer - which says the true meaning of Christmas is in “money, money, money” before he says, “My own dog, gone commercial!” We see Snoopy cast as all of the animals in the Christmas play, including the penguin, and Snoopy enjoys food (like many of us in this season!) and then there’s this clip:

SHOW MEDIA: *Snoopy dancing*

The music stops, and Snoopy keeps dancing. When no one else is excited, he stops, and slinks away.

Snoopy likes many of the things that we like: decorating, good food, and doing fun things like dancing or going new movies or parties. There’s something about Snoopy’s sense of enjoyment that I really love. And I admire that trait in others - those who can find enjoyment in the midst of whatever it is they’re doing and not get sidetracked when things don’t go just how they planned. Perhaps Snoopy also reflects the opposite of Lucy’s need for control!

But Snoopy also challenges us to consider the difference between enjoyment and finding true joy and contentment. There are a lot of things to enjoy right now like beautiful decorations and good food and parties, and we can enjoy them, but we have to know that they don’t last or fill us forever.

Enjoyment is temporal - it doesn't last; true joy is eternal - it lasts forever. Joy is not happiness. C.S. Lewis said, "Joy is the serious business of Heaven." Someone said, "Joy is not the absence of sorrow, but the presence of God."

Joy is deeper than happiness. It's more profound and more difficult to describe, and yet, we know it when we see it. We know when we're around someone who's full of joy – not just a happy person, but someone whose countenance makes us look twice and realize that there's something deeper. Joy radiates out from people.

Maybe you know people who are truly joyful. I think of a man I know who is funny and always ready with a joke, but it's not just his humor that makes a difference. There's a deep sense of being connected to others that matters to him and a servant's heart that shows the joy of the Lord. He might not describe it as "joy," but that's what he reflects to me.

I've also been thinking about my grandma. It will be three years tomorrow since she died. Her life was joy-filled. She made a decision to follow Jesus early in life, and that led her throughout her 93 years. She was clear about her hope in God to love her and love others unconditionally. She was at peace in her heart, and she was full of joy that spilled over into the way she loved and cared about others.

Advent is important because it helps us to find meaning and remember why Christmas is so important and necessary. It's a time when we gather together and celebrate, but we are people in need of a Savior. We are beloved children of God who need the gift of salvation. We need hope and peace. We crave joy – the deep down sense of God's presence and power in our lives – not simply happiness that comes and goes.

Joy is a product of grace. Joy comes from receiving God's grace - a gift that we don't earn or deserve. It's not a goal we pursue, but a gift that we receive from God. The best definition of joy I know is that joy is "grace recognized."

Joy isn't based on our present circumstances. In fact, joy has more to do with perseverance and trust when things aren't going quite right. There's the word to us from First Thessalonians: "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." It says, "give thanks in" not "give thanks for," and there's a big difference! We cannot find true joy in stuff or circumstances or experiences – not in fun things of this season - no matter how hard we try.

It's not that God doesn't want us to be happy. Enjoying life is important; God created us and desires the best for us. But God knows that we can't really find joy – that deep-down assurance of God's presence – anywhere except in God. We find joy in God. We find refuge in a relationship with God.

Charlie Brown is seeking meaning and hope beyond what he sees at Christmas - more than the commercialism that surrounds him. He wants more. Lucy reminds us

that we're called to give up control and allow God to offer us direction, which can offer us peace. Snoopy reminds us to claim the joy we find in Jesus.

We yearn for joy, but it's easy to focus on everything that's wrong and forget that we do have reasons to be joyful. How do we recognize God's grace in our lives all the time? Certainly there are difficulties we face. We are lonely. We feel out of place, even within our own families. We try to escape the tirade of the holidays. We struggle with things happening that seem outside of our control. But how can we call out God's grace in this midst of each day?

The other challenge for us is to realize that Jesus Christ – the One we worship and the One we wait for this Advent – wants us to find joy in him. Our task as Christians is to be open to the common human need for joy – and to share our experience of joy in Jesus Christ.

So maybe there's a problem in how we've defined joy. Perhaps we've made joy out simply to be happiness. We say we feel joy if everything's going our way, if there's no conflict in our relationships, if we're not worried about anything. But that's more about happiness. Joy has more to do with perseverance and trust when things aren't going quite right. Joy is that trust of God's presence in the midst of every moment, and we hear the call to joy throughout Scripture.

Paul appeals to the people at Philippi to rejoice – and it's a directive, not a suggestion! Now understand that Paul wrote to them from prison – surely not a place where joy would be a common theme. Yet, he calls them to be confident and even bold in God's power to bring salvation.

And it's important to know that the church in Philippi had some conflicts, so Paul wrote to a community in conflict. He reminded them to have joy because of Jesus Christ. Whatever situation they faced, Paul encouraged them to be gentle in spirit and to trust God in prayer. Can you imagine if we took that to heart? Be gentle in spirit. Trust God in prayer.

Joy is different than happiness. Joy comes when we have a sense of God's presence and power, when we can face struggle and uncertainty knowing that God is beside us, when we allow ourselves to reach out to others and recognize our connection to God and one another.

That's what we hear from the prophet Isaiah - a sense of joy because of God's salvation – the promise of forgiveness and new life. Isaiah says that trusting in God for salvation takes away his fear. And that's the opportunity we have today - to trust in God and not be afraid - because God offers salvation. God stands with us and delivers us from sin and death to eternal life.

I remember a conversation I had about worship years ago that really impacted me. A person said, "There should be more rejoicing about what Jesus Christ has done in our lives. We need more time for answered prayer rather than worry. We need less complaining – don't we know that we're children of God?" I think it was the Holy Spirit

speaking – a reminder that joy is essential to our Christian walk. But how many people use the word “joy” when they talk about Christians? Are we doing a good job at showing joy? How can we do better at showing the joy of the Lord? Not the joy of getting what we want, but the joy of knowing God is with us?

Advent is a time to remember just how much we need Jesus – and how much the whole world needs Jesus. God made a way for us to experience God fully in Jesus - to show us how love changes the world.

Our joy is in Jesus Christ, and it’s a powerful force that transforms our lives and the world. There are so many opportunities to enjoy ourselves - fun, food, friends – and they’re important, but they don’t ultimately sustain us when the season’s over and we feel lonely or bored, when we’re struggling with getting back to healthy eating, or when we’re looking at the debt we’ve racked up.

It’s the joy of knowing God’s unconditional love for us that sustains us. It’s the joy of knowing that we’re not alone that sustains us. It’s the joy of trusting that God’s grace is enough. It’s the joy of knowing that God calls us to share the hope, peace, and joy of Jesus through loving God and loving others. And it matters. Our witness of joy to the world matters.

Friends, I truly hope you enjoy this season. But even more, I hope we seek true hope, peace, and joy in Jesus Christ, the One who brings salvation.

Let us pray...

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE