

Sermon Starter – Oh, That You Would Reveal Your Joy

Luke 1:46b-55, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24, John 1:6-8, 19-28

On the third Sunday of Advent, the theme of joy emerges from the text and sets the tone for our celebration. Joy is more than an emotion. Joy inspires Isaiah to call for celebration in the midst of hardship; it gives Paul the passion to preach even when he is in prison. Seek the joy of the Lord this day.

As Christmas Day approaches, the season's commercialized promises of joy can become distracting or even oppressive. Every year we are asked to believe that tinsel, gifts, and huge credit card bills will bring the joy that we long for. But we know that while decorations and gifts can aid us in our celebrations, they are not ends in themselves. Abiding joy is found in the search for God's gift, a gift we often have difficulty recognizing. John 1:26 confronts us with a challenge: "Among you stands one whom you do not know." Jesus may be as hard to recognize within our culture's Christmas celebrations as he was when he was born in Bethlehem and walked in Galilee.

Preachers can give their congregations the gift of a new perspective this Sunday. The greatest Christmas gift we can offer may be an invitation to a new or renewed relationship with Jesus Christ. The foundation for that relationship is gratitude (giving thanks in all circumstances, 1 Thessalonians 5:18-19) in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. If people in the congregation are saying, "It doesn't feel like Christmas yet," invite them to seek a renewal of their relationship with God as a more fruitful way of rediscovering the Christmas spirit than spending another two hours at the local mall.

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