

“Rejoice with Joy and Singing”

Before the reading of this scripture:

As we heard last week, the LORD God is the redeemer of the Creation,
Not just the savior of human beings.

This reality is very apparent in today’s reading,

Which goes back and forth between restoring creation and repairing human beings.

Please Note:

Having too much water is a problem, a real problem,
as we are experiencing with Lake Michigan right now.

But if you HAVE to choose between having too much water, and not enough water,
I recommend you choose too much.

Usually engineers and human ingenuity can find ways to disperse too much water.

It is far harder to get enough water where there is little or none.

The Middle East has had chronic water shortages for millennia.

Those people of God understood at a visceral level what it meant to live
in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.

As you listen to this prophecy of Salvation in Isaiah 35,
please ponder the joy of clean, cool, fresh water
when you had none before.

Let us listen to the Word of God!

The Bible speaks of “joy” over 200 times.

In the Wisdom literature of the Bible (eg. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, some Psalms)

The joys in ordinary life are highlighted.

The love of a spouse (Prov. 5:18, Eccl. 9:9)

Wise children (Prov. 10:1)

Good meals (Eccl. 10:19; Ps. 104:15)

Harvest time (Ps. 126:5-6) – Berry and fruit picking

Fruit of one’s labors (Eccl. 3:22) – Honest wages for honest work.

An “apt answer” (Prov. 12:20) – Having just the right words at the right moment.

Such events and happenings certainly do call for rejoicing.

Yet, we and the Bible know that such ordinary joy is vulnerable.

Spouses can be unloving and unfaithful.

Children can make unwise decisions.

Meals can be spoiled.

Floods or droughts can destroy harvests.

Not everyone receives the just fruit of his or her labors.
And words fail us sometimes.

Which is why most biblical joy, as in Isaiah 35, is theologically based.
Joy that is stable celebrates who God is and what God does!
Because of God's being and God's action,
the people of God have experienced
Deliverance
Protection
Steadfast love,
Forgiveness and restoration

I learned this week one of the reasons Laurie is such a good preacher,
after attending the Bible Study last Tuesday morning:

The sharing was truly enlightening

Margie told a marvelous story. I have her permission to read it.

"My Aunt Elaine called me in early June of 1997 to ask how I doing in regards to adopting a baby. I recounted that I had been praying and begging God fervently for two years and four months, and I still haven't received my baby yet. She replied: "Stop asking God for a baby, and please just start thanking him for the child he is going to bring you"!

So in my mind and heart I made an intentional shift, and began thanking God for my baby. I CLAIMED MY CHILD. I told God how much I loved the baby that he was bringing me. I started to feel like a mother, even though there was no baby in sight.
I felt the joy that was going to happen to us as a family.
I asked him if my baby was born yet because
I was experiencing such a strong connection to my child.

Two weeks later my 25 day-old baby was delivered to me on June 17, 1997.
I have not stopped thanking God for my blessed joyous daughter.
It is my first thanksgiving prayer when I open my eyes in the morning,
and my last prayer of the night before closing my eyes.
"Thank you lord for giving me my precious Abby".

I will never ever stop thanking him for allowing me, at two months shy of my 49th birthday, in humble gratitude, join the only club I ever wanted to be in . . . "The Mom's Club"

Now, as wonderful as this story is, we need to acknowledge that not every person gets to be in the Mom's Club or Dad's Club who deeply desires to be.

Yet, Margie's joy is biblical, because it was anticipatory.
It is based on a fervent hope in God that God's will is good and powerful and loving!
Therefore, we live in joy, in spite of present circumstances.

One of the most surprising and deep aspects of joy,
Is that it can come from the vengeance of God.

“Say to those who are of a fearful heart, ‘Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you.’” (Isaiah 35:4)

Of course, joy bubbles forth when God vindicates the unjustly accused or mistreated.

Yet, throughout the scriptures, we are instructed that God disciplines those he loves.

To be the children of God means, in part, to have higher expectations placed upon us,
for we have received the revelation and grace of God.

We know we have aspects of ourselves that are imperfect and impure, needing repair and renewal.

Part of Christian joy is the knowledge and hope that God is still working on us,
Purifying us, disciplining us.

The big theological word is “sanctification.”

In short, God just loves us too much to let us continue to wallow in our own filth and sin.

So sisters and brothers of faith,

For the ordinary good gifts of life, which are not always ordinary at all, rejoice!

For the deep and abiding truth of God’s love and care for creation and us creatures, rejoice!

Even when God reeks vengeance on the unsavory and mostly unseen parts of our lives,
Rejoice!

And let me remind you about something you already know,

Joy is not just an inward feeling, because biblical joy always breaks forth
into some kind of appropriate behavior

Biblical joy leads to clapping, to dancing, to feasting, and especially to singing.

Joy is never personal, but must be shared in worship and in fellowship.

Some skeptics claim that eternal life would eventually become drab and boring,

but they have no understanding of eschatological joy! The JOY of the LORD!

In the presence of God is everlasting joy!

Amen and amen.

Let us STAND and sing!

The Call to Discipleship:

Richard Rohr, a Catholic theologian in New Mexico, has a way with words:

“Maturity is the ability to joyfully live in an imperfect world.”

It is an honor and pleasure to minister with so many mature Christians.