

Choosing Joy in All Circumstances

On this third Sunday of Advent, we are celebrating joy and discussing choosing joy in all circumstances.

Introduction

This is the season of the year when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. The Church has traditionally celebrated each Sunday in December leading up to Christmas Day by teaching and contemplating on four of the main themes that Jesus brought to us. These things are hope, peace, joy, and love.

Each week we talk about one of these topics leading up to Christmas when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. We also light a candle each Sunday. You will see that we have three candles lit. This week's candle is pink and is for joy which leads us to today's encouraging message, choosing joy in all circumstances.

We haven't spoken about the candles yet. Lighting the candles is a tradition and points to letting our light shine in the world. The colors are purple, pink, and white. The three purple candles are for hope, peace, and love. The pink candle is for joy and the white candle is for Christ himself. Purple was chosen because it is a royal color. Pink was chosen for the week of joy because it is brighter and more joyful, especially in the dark days of winter when we celebrate Advent. Finally, the white candle signifies the purity of Christ.

If you are celebrating with us and have candles you are lighting, do not let the colors concern you. This is merely tradition. The important aspect of celebrating Advent is to reflect on the gift that Jesus was and is to the world and share the hope, peace, joy, and love that Christ brings to us with the world every day. That is truly celebrating Advent every day of the year.

The world tends to consider joy and happiness to be the same thing. This is not true. Joy and happiness are two different things. Happiness is an emotion that is often a result of outside stimuli. Joy is a gift from God. Happiness can not coexist with sadness but true joy can. True joy can only come from one source, Jesus Christ.

The Source of Joy

The Bible teaches us that Jesus is the source of all our true joy. We cannot create joy in our hearts ourselves. It is not the result of accomplishing our dreams. Joy is an outward expression of a heart that is filled with the presence of Christ.

John 15:9-11 says:

John 15:9-11

(9) "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. (10) If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. (11) I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Jesus said he tells us this so that his joy may be in us. He has true joy and is the source of our joy. This is the joy that has no end. It is difficult to snuff out and gets deeper as our relationship with Jesus gets stronger.



The psalmist tells us in Psalms 19:8:

Psalms 19:8

(8) The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

The true joy in our hearts from Jesus will shine out of us. It will outlast anything the world can give us. People will see the joy of Christ in our eyes as they shine, even in the midst of trials and tribulations.

Simply put, true joy comes from a relationship with Christ.

Joy in the Midst of Trials

Earlier this week I shared a post I saw on Facebook from the Clergy Coaching Network that started out saying, "Someone you know is preparing for their first Christmas without their husband, wife, mother, father, brother, sister, daughter, or son. Others are preparing for their last Christmas."

We all face trials and tribulations. That is a part of life living in this fallen and dying world. The devil will try to distract you from the plan and purpose God has created you for. He will try and rob you of the joy you have in your heart by distracting your focus away from Jesus. These distractions often come as trials and tribulations in your everyday life.

We face financial setbacks, disasters, loss of loved ones, and more. Yet, Jesus is always with us. His joy is always in our hearts if we let him live in our hearts. Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit, to comfort us and guide us as we face trials and tribulations.

James teaches us in James 1:2-3:

James 1:2-3

(2) Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, (3) because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

You can know that you are making a positive difference in this world for Christ when you see the devil throwing all sorts of obstacles in your way. The more trials you face, the more joy you can take note of because you are having an impact.

We can still have joy when we face difficulties, lose loved ones, and endure disasters. This joy, that comes from Jesus in our hearts, can outlast anything the devil can send our way. To do this, we must choose joy in all circumstances.

Choosing Joy Daily

There are some practical ways to choose joy in all circumstances.

Start and end each day with a mindset of gratitude. Be thankful for a fresh start each new day. Each day we wake up to is an opportunity to serve Jesus by being his hands and feet to others. In your morning prayer time, even if it is only for a minute, thank the Lord for the opportunity to serve him that day and ask him to show you how you can serve him by serving others that day.



At the end of the day do likewise. Do not go to bed until you have replayed the day in your mind and thanked the Lord for the positive moments that day and the opportunities to learn from the difficult moments. Think about the positive things that took place throughout that day. There will always be something, no matter how terrible the day has been.

Serve others each day in the name of Jesus Christ. That can be an encouraging word, or assisting them with a task. Look at how Jesus interacted with people as recorded in the Bible and do likewise. Show grace, mercy, and compassion to others, and have fun.

Smile. Yes, smile to others. It is very difficult to not smile when we see someone smiling at us. As you see people, make eye contact, and smile. Smiles are contagious! You will have no idea the uplift you give someone by merely smiling at them.

Conclusion

Today, as we celebrate the week of Joy in Advent we encourage you to cultivate a spirit of gratitude and joy by intentionally focusing on Jesus Christ and the positive aspects of your life. Count all trials and difficulties you face as an opportunity to show the joy of the Lord in the face of adversity and difficulty.

Share joy with others by being the hands and feet of Jesus and showing acts of kindness and generosity to others. Ask the Lord to let you see those around you as he sees them and then love them as he loves them. This will show them a measure of true joy that can only be had through a life dedicated to Jesus but also allow you to experience more joy than you ever could on your own.

Join us next Sunday as we light the fourth candle and talk about Radical Love.

