*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 14 - 19

Fourth Week of Advent: Joy

**Monday, December 14 Zephaniah 3:14-17**

*“The Lord will rejoice over you”*

 What could be greater than God’s gladness? It indicates the longing of the Lord’s heart. God will celebrate when we live the life of hope he has provided. God rejoices when our lives of selfishness and pride are reversed and we begin living in hope of his coming kingdom. The real reversal of our lives is not based simply in admitting our sin but in truly repenting. True repentance means changed personal and social realities.

 When people humbly receive the gospel and allow it to transform them, God rejoices and sings. When diverse people call on the name of the Lord with one voice, God is delighted. His rejoicing is like that of a father waiting for and celebrating when the prodigal son returns home. Even in a prophetic book like Zephaniah known for its judgment of sinners, the heart of God longs to bring his people home. God desires to restore us to himself and all are invited to the homecoming party. Every Sunday is a reminder to celebrate Christ’s Easter Resurrection victory over sin, death, and the evil one.

*How amazing it is, Lord, that you rejoice over me. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 15 Psalm 33:1-5**

*“Let the godly sing with joy to the Lord”*

 This psalm is a hymn of praise to God. The opening of the psalm (the first three verses) is made up of six half-verses, five of which call the reader/listener to praise God. The verbs describe various aspects of music-making, both instrumental and vocal, that must have played a regular part of worship in the Jerusalem temple. The righteous and upright are called to “sing joyfully,” “praise . . . with the harp,” “make music . . . on the ten-stringed lyre,” “sing . . . a new song,” “play skillfully,” and “shout for joy.” The scene is a noisy, joyous occasion with musicians, singers, and worshippers joining together in enthusiastic praise.

 The psalm goes on in verses four and five to lay the motivating reasoning behind the call to praise, which is the right and faithful character of God. What God says is “right and true” (literally, “is on the level”), and he is “faithful” (steady, reliable, honest) in all he does. Because God himself is upright and reliable, he loves righteousness and justice in the world he has created and his own dealings with his creatures demonstrate his unfailing love to them.

*I joyfully praise you, Lord, for you are truly worthy of praise. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 16 Romans 5:1-11**

*“We rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God”*

 The early chapters of Paul’s letter to the Romans expose the awfulness of the human condition in somber, solemn language which is hardly designed to make people clap their hands and kick up their spiritual heels. Indeed, such a response would be quite out of keeping with the message being conveyed. But when the Apostle switches in this chapter to writing about God’s love for us through Jesus Christ which has brought us into a right relationship with him, saving us from our sin and guaranteeing our eternal life, it would be strange if those who believe the message were able to assimilate it into their lives and still sit on their hands and keep from breaking into expressions of joy.

 It is clear that the Apostle believed that Christians should be both somberly reverent at times and joyfully exuberant at other times. On three occasions in these eleven verses he uses the Greek word *kauchasthai* which means “rejoice.” It is right and proper that Christians should rejoice in whatever manner they feel is compatible with their experience of Christ.

*Whether quietly or enthusiastically, Lord, I rejoice in you. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 14 - 19

Fourth Week of Advent: Joy

**Thursday, December 17 Luke 19:1-9**

*“Zacchaeus brought Jesus to his house in great joy”*

 Conversion, or sudden change, is at the very center of the biblical message. Throughout the Old and New Testament, the message is that it’s never too late to change. You need not be locked into what you have always been and done. You are not a prisoner of your track record. Whatever your past life, it is never too late to repent and turn to God. Conversion is God’s gift to anyone, even to a man like Zacchaeus who was a person of especially dubious background.

 Passing through the city of Jericho, the crowds had come out to see Jesus. Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector, was a part of that crowd. But, being a short man, he was unable to see, so he climbed a tree. Jesus notices Zacchaeus and summons him to come down and feed his disciples and himself. Immediately, Zacchaeus scrambles down and “in great joy” brings Jesus to his home. While the people grumbled that Jesus would eat with a “sinner” such as Zacchaeus, Jesus knew his heart. He knew that Zacchaeus was ready for a change of life, for a new start, and that very day salvation came to his house.

*With great joy, Lord, I have invited you into my heart. Amen.*

**Friday, December 18 Isaiah 65:17-25**

*“Rejoice in my new creation”*

 This world in which we live is not the final reality. The Isaiah passage reveals what is coming when God, who created this world, will one day create something new. This new creation will be in continuity with what had been (“new heaven,” “new earth,” “new Jerusalem”). Yet, it will be a completely new expression of these things. It is precisely because they are new that the tragic aspects of this world will not be repeated in them. Sin’s presence will not be allowed.

 Because God will do this in the future, we can be glad and rejoice today. And, while our current joy is always tempered with the reality of worldly sorrow, in God’s new creation there will be no sorrow: “The sound of weeping and of crying will be heard no more.” Thus, our joy in God’s new creation will be pure joy unaffected by grief.

 Our sorrow may last for a day, but our joy will last for all eternity. Do not lose hope but remain faithful to our God who knows our troubles and has a plan for us to join him in a new creation. Rejoice in what will be.

*With joyful anticipation, Lord, I look forward to your new creation. Amen.*

**Saturday, December 19 John 3:27-36**

*“I am filled with joy at his success”*

 The beautiful picture of marriage, which had a powerful meaning in Jewish life, is used to illustrate John the Baptist’s place in relation to Jesus. John is clear that he is not the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom. The relationship between God and his people is often spoken of as bridegroom and bride in the Old Testament. But Jesus had now come as the bridegroom in this new age to claim those who believe in him as his bride. It is John the Baptist, the friend, who has prepared the way for the bridegroom to meet his bride.

 The friend of the bridegroom had an important place in Jewish weddings. He was the liaison who presented the bride to the bridegroom, then presided at the wedding, and later, after the wedding, guarded the bridal chamber from false intruders. When the full, clear word of the bridegroom’s love for his beloved bride is spoken, then the friend can rejoice, for his task is complete. John has announced the way for the bridegroom who will now take center stage as the glory of God will be revealed through his mighty works.

*I rejoice, Lord, that you succeeded in everything you came to do. Amen.*