

Finding Joy

How many people remember dish detergent ads from the 70's and 80's? Some of us can go back even further than that or have heard ads on the radio. I remember seeing an ad for Joy dishwashing detergent. The slogan was, "It makes washing dishes a joy!" Now, I don't know about you, but the only two times that I experienced joy I had about doing the dishes after a meal is when someone else is doing them, or they are finally done. However, the dishes are always clean and put away.

Well, if that isn't doing it for you, how about Marie Kondo's "Tidying Up With Marie Kondo?" In her book that helps us reduce clutter, Kondo tells us to ask "Does this thing bring us joy?" Sometimes we find ourselves going through our own treasures, and we know that we have to de-clutter for In its own way, I think Marie may be on to something about the joy that we can feel today as we look at our readings from Scripture.

Isaiah's reading today is practically "dripping" in joy. In a desert culture, images of flowing water and lush greenery are signs of good

fortune, of blessing and prosperity, and, of course, of joy. But does Isaiah go overboard, turning the desert into a swamp and the hardy desert grasses into reeds and rushes – river plants. There are pools and springs; it almost overwhelms.

Isaiah also gives us some insight into the nature of joy. Joy is communal; joy is shared and sharable. It helps us reach out and gather up others, particularly those who aren't yet experiencing the joy.

“Strengthen the weak hands” is a statement designed to help us be with others. It isn't “strengthen your own weak hands,” but strengthen the hands of others. And it is an imperative in the Hebrew – get out there and strengthen!

It may seem a little funny to find joy in a prison cell, but somehow John the Baptist manages to do just that, even in a deplorable situation. When he sends word out to discover if Jesus of Nazareth is truly who he thought he was and gets the response, John is truly elated. All of this, even being thrown into prison wasn't for naught. Hearing that Jesus' ministry is going well, he is strengthened to endure whatever will come

his way. So, John found joy, even in a situation, being in prison, that we would not find exactly “joyful.”

There are people here today who, in this season of joy, who are also struggling in situations about which we know nothing. They may even manage to put on a brave front and look as though everything is fine, when it really is not. Perhaps this is their way of spreading joy or finding joy in the midst of their suffering.

For us gathered here, the pink candle that we lit on this Third Sunday of Advent, signifies that the season of Christmas is truly coming. We have spent our time reflecting on whether we are ready to accept the “re-birth” of our relationship with Christ as we prepare to celebrate his birth. We are ready to hear the Scriptures of his birth, the events surrounding it from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke that prepare us or even fill in some of the gaps for the birth of the Son of God. So today, let us try to experience joy in our lives, our hearts and our souls. O Come, O Come Emmanuel,