

# Aldersgate UMC of Butte, MT

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**December 12, 2021**

3rd Sunday of Advent

Living into a More Beloved Community Through JOY

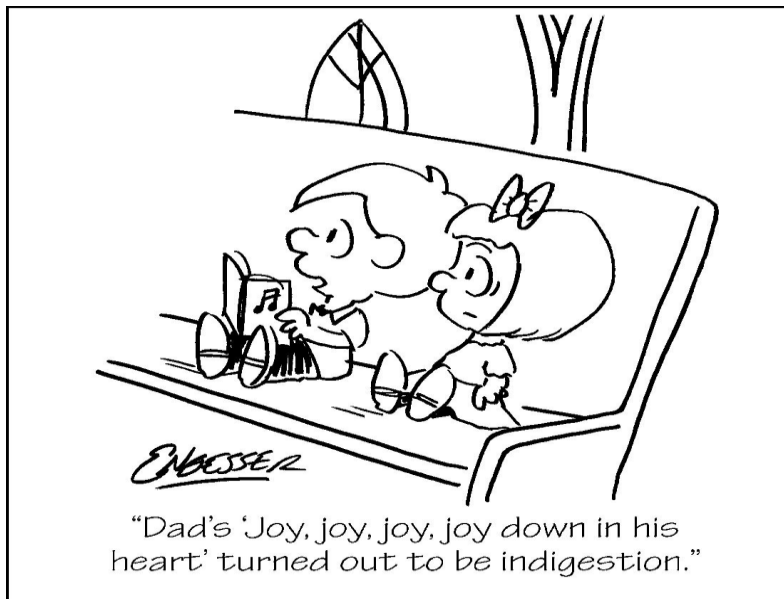
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**Message**

*Rejoice, Always - Really?*

Matthias Krier

As you all know, things are not always as they seem, are they?



Yes, as you know, things are not always as they seem. Another example are folks who pretend that all is well, all the time. While my glass is generally half full, instead of being half empty, things are not always good.

Last week we were talking a good deal about this peace that surpasses all understanding. If you were not here, I was talking about if and when we learn to live in harmony with one another, we could then find real peace. Furthermore from last week's message, as a people we may not know a

collective peace, but we can know the peace of Christ at any given moment. This is because this peace that Christ offers is not of this world.

Today, we lit the candle of JOY which is pink or rose colored in most churches. It is a different color to symbolize JOY instead of penitence.

Today's lectionary reading from Philippians speaks to a joy that often feels out of reach. Incidentally, you may or may not be aware that the Book of Philippians has been called by some *The Most Joyful Book of the Bible*. Inside Philippians with only 104 verses, are 16 verses proclaiming JOY and REJOICING!

My question is whether or not we can maintain that JOY?\_Philippians 4:4 says:



Rejoicing in the Lord, always, sounds like a grand ideal, does it not? However, one must ask, is it realistic? Even if you are a person whose glass is always half full, instead of half empty, who can always be joyful no matter what is happening in your life?

I see myself as a pretty upbeat kind of person, but I cannot always be joyful as much as I would like to be. Someone in Mid Week Reflections this week related how they are pretty joyful in the morning, but as the day wears on with what is going on in the world, what may be going on with family, that JOY dissipates and reality sets in. I do not need to go into a laundry list of the "bad news" in our nation and around the world, you can read about it or

watch it unfold on TV. Instead of the bad news, hear this good news from Jesus in John 15:11:



Did you hear that? Jesus said, *“My joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full.”*

Okay, okay, while this may seem impossible, we know that with God all things are possible! Let’s explore how.

While I seem unable to be joyful at all times or unable to rejoice in the Lord at all times, maybe this passage can lead to this kind of joy. Let’s take it one verse at a time. Verse 5 states: *“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”*

Hearing this, reminds us of what Jesus said in the Beatitudes: *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”* Who remembers what the word meek means?

*Gentle Strength.* So the translation would sound like this: *“Blessed are those with gentle strength, for they shall inherit the earth.”* As you may or may not remember from previous sermons, we are not meant to be a doormat, but neither are we meant to be aggressive in our witness to others.

As the verse suggests: *“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”*

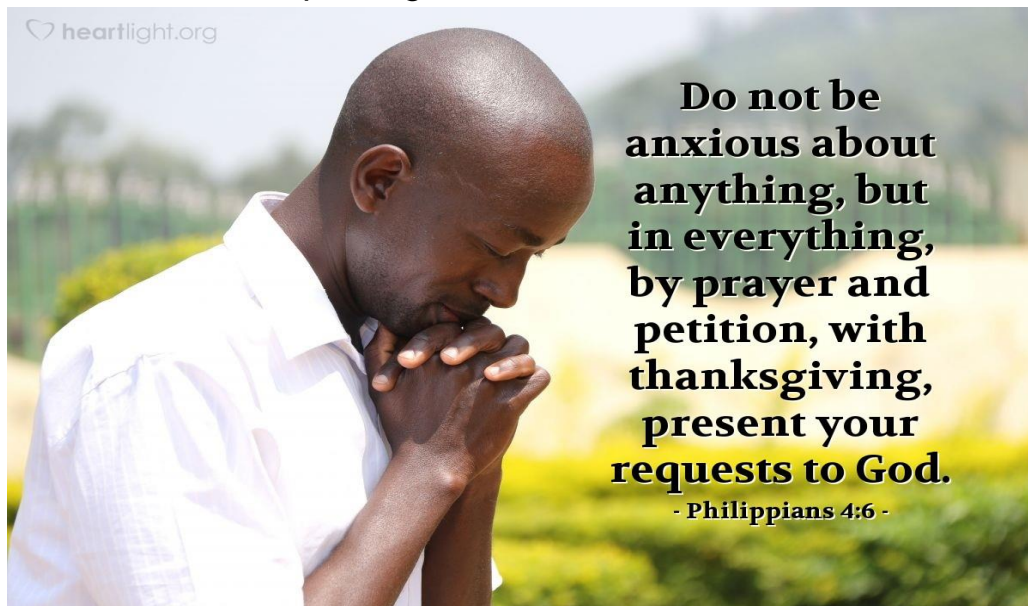
In other words, the Lord is right here, right now, in our midst and *ruach* is why?

*Ruach* is the Hebrew word when translated has three English words to describe: *wind, breath and spirit*. When I become fully conscious of *ruach* as I breathe, I become conscious that the breath of God is breathing through me. How can one not know peace as well as joy when breathing the breath and spirit of God. Take a few deep breaths right now conscious of breathing the breath of life that was breathed into Adam & Eve. Fred will play something softly as you breathe *ruach* ...

*(Pause here for about 60 seconds)*

I invite you to do this for a few minutes each day whether you are walking or whether you are meditating simply being conscious of the gift you are receiving each and every moment you breathe.

Our next verse from our passage states:



I do not claim to understand the mystery of prayer, especially prayers of petition. But what I do understand is that in all things give thanks, as hard as it may be, to give thanks and to count our blessings especially when we experience loss of one kind or another. It is easy to somehow forget all the blessings we have in our lives.

One of my favorite all time movies is *"It's a Wonderful Life"*. How many have you seen the movie? I had not seen the movie up until about 20 years ago when a dear friend asked if I had seen it. "No," I said, "I have seen a clip of it here and there and it looks even too dorky for me." He looked incredulous and said, "Well, for a guy who likes to think he is open-minded, you're not!" So I watched it and loved it! I have watched the movie a dozen times or so over the last 20 years. I will probably be watching it again over the holidays. This movie has a way of making us grateful for what one has.

As Meister Eckhart so eloquently shared: *"If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough."*

Now, are we ready for this next verse which may be the result of knowing this joy that Jesus promises. Thus far in knowing this joy is to let our gentleness to be known to everyone, the Lord is near. As a matter of fact, the Lord is experienced in our breathing ruach, the breath of God breathing through us and offering us life in each and every moment for we know what happens when a person stops breathing this breath of life, don't we? Thus far, in knowing this joy from Jesus is to live with an attitude of gratitude no matter the circumstances of life.

Now we hear the culmination of doing these things in our next verse:



As I contemplate this verse and as I contemplate the previous verses we have looked at today, this one single word comes to mind that can lead us to JOY. And what is this one single word that can lead us to joy?

**Trust!** From Proverbs 3:5,6 we read: *“Trust in God with all your heart and lean not into your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge God and God will direct your paths.”*

**Let us pray:** Oh gracious God as we breathe the breath of life, may we know your joy through gentleness, gratefulness & trusting you with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. Amen and so be it!

**Special Music**      Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus      Fred Crase