

*“Repeat the Sounding Joy: Loving Joy”*

Last week, we began our worship series celebrating the 300th anniversary of the beloved hymn, **“Joy to the World”** with our focus on **“Joy”**, especially **“Hopeful Joy”**. In the sermon, I made use of **The Book of Joy** by the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu with Douglas Abrams. Those two spiritual leaders shared how having **“Joy”** is even more important than happiness. My message utilized some quotations from the book to celebrate how we have a **“Hopeful Joy”** because God promised some very good reasons for Hope in the fulfilled Kingdom of God.

This week, we remember that **“repeating the sounding joy”**, is the way in which the **reverberations of God’s Agape Love** are spread throughout the world. Last Sunday, as we were considering how we need to live Hopeful Joy, I quoted Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who said to the Dalai Lama, **“And I hope we can convey to God’s children out there how deeply they are loved. How deeply, deeply precious they are to this God.”** **The Good News, as we approach our Celebration of Christmas – the Birth**

**of God's Son, Jesus the Christ, is how the sending of the Only Son of God into the world for us by our Divine Parent is a powerful demonstration of our Creator's Agape Love for all people, including you and me!** To help us understand the deepest meaning of the Christ Event, we are going to remember God's Promise from long before Jesus' Birth, the Gospel of John's account of the role of The Word in Creation and what happened when The Word became flesh, and Jesus' own testimony about why he was sent into the world by God.

As was said in the introduction about our Reading from the Book of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah offers a vision of radical love — the wolf and the lamb living together and being led by an innocent child. This Scripture is a Promise of God about the way our Divine Parent transforms humanity's relationship with the Almighty from a very broken one into a New Relationship with a New Life. It truly was a Promise of Hope and Joy! The prophecy began, *"A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse; a branch will sprout from his roots."* Jesse was King David's

father, so the reference meant a descendant of King David was going to come forth as the People of God were experiencing great oppression, distress, and self-destruction. The Birth Narratives of Jesus indicate he was considered a descendant of King David – he was born in David’s town, Bethlehem.

Speaking through the Prophet Isaiah, God explained, ***“The Lord’s Spirit will rest upon him, a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of planning and strength, a Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.”***

God’s Holy Spirit would be with this Promised One – the Messiah.

Indeed, the Gospel’s have told us the Holy Spirit was upon Jesus.

Isaiah went on to share how this Promised One would be the True

Defender of Justice, as he said, ***“He won’t judge by appearances,***

***nor decide by hearsay. He will judge the needy with righteousness,***

***and decide with equity for those who suffer in the land. He will strike***

***the violent with the rod of his mouth; by the breath of his lips he will kill***

***the wicked.”*** (PAUSE) Most of the rest of the Isaiah Reading promises

the Messiah will usher in a time of Great Peace – Shalom – Reconciliation and Love among all the creatures of Creation. **God’s Promises in this Isaiah Reading are reason for Joy and the celebration of the Creator’s Love for All People and All of Creation!**

I hope we all recognize from the Isaiah Scripture that God really cares about us and the Creation. We are real to our Divine Parent. (PAUSE) It reminds me of “an old story about a family consisting of mother, father, and small son who went into a restaurant. As they were seated at the table, the waitress sailed up. You know, the particular kind of waitress who moves as though she were the captain of a ship. She sailed up, pad in efficient hand, looked, and waited. The parents ordered. Then the boy looked up and said plaintively, **‘I want a hot dog.’** **‘No hot dog!’** said the mother. **‘Bring him potatoes, beef, and a vegetable.’** The waitress paused for a moment, and then looked at the boy squarely and said, **‘Yes, sir. What do you want on your hot dog?’** **‘Ketchup - lots of ketchup - and a glass of milk.’** **‘One hot dog, coming up,’** said the waitress and

**sailed off toward the kitchen. The boy turned to his parents and said, ‘Gee, Mom, she thinks I’m real!’”**

After telling that story, its conveyor went on to say, “Well, our children are real. Sometimes they are real headaches, but always a real responsibility, and always worth considering as real persons with real lives of their own. One reason that we are real is because God thinks we are real.” **“He created all of us to be His children.”** (PAUSE) (Posted on sermons.com)

Yes, God Loves all people because we are God’s Children! The Gospel of John Reading from Chapter 1 filled in more of the story about that “shoot” out of Jesse’s stump by taking us back to the time of Creation and the role of The Word and then jumping ahead to the sending of The Word into the world. Take special note to the reference to the relationship between The Word in human form and the revealing of the Children of God. John wrote, ***“He was the source of Life, and that Life was the Light for humanity. The Light shines in the dark, and the dark has never***

*extinguished it. God sent a man named John to be his messenger. John came to declare the truth about the Light so that everyone would become believers through his message. John was not the Light, but he came to declare the truth about the Light. The Real Light, which shines on everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into existence through him. Yet, the world didn't recognize him. He went to his own people, and his own people didn't accept him. However, he gave the right to become God's Children to everyone who believed in him.*" (PAUSE) So, The Word through which God Created the Universe, including Life and Light, became a human being and a major part of why he was sent was to show everyone they are God's Children! Of course, that message means nothing to someone, who refuses to receive it.

Our Joy has a much more specific connection to God's Agape – Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for us, as we look at what Jesus told

Nicodemus in our Reading from John 3. **Jesus said, "As Moses lifted up**

*the snake on a pole in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.*

*Then everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.” (PAUSE)*

God had Moses lift up a bronze snake on a pole for everyone to look at when they were bitten by poisonous snakes as a way to allow God to save them from death. Jesus was saying he would also “be lifted up” so we would look at him and realize God has saved us from our self-destruction and invites us into the New Life of God’s Fulfilled Kingdom.

Why was God doing that? Jesus answered that question, ***“God Agape Loved the world this way: He gave His Only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life. God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world.”***

(PAUSE) Just as those snake bitten Hebrews were healed and saved from death by trusting God and looking at the bronze snake on a pole, so also everyone who trusts God and looks at the ultimate expression of God’s Agape Love for humanity – the Crucified and Risen Jesus Christ will also realize they are no longer prisoners of death but are Agape Loved Children

of God, who belong to God and are welcomed by God into the New Relationship with God and New Life in Christ.

What Jesus explained about why God sent him into this world is extraordinary. Some may ask, **“Why would God act in such a sacrificial loving fashion?”** The following story helps us acknowledge the amazing nature of what God has done for us. The story “comes out of the Bedouin culture. These people live much as the characters of the Old Testament did. During a heated argument, according to this story, a young Bedouin struck and killed a friend of his. Knowing the ancient, inflexible customs of his people, the young man fled, running across the desert under the cover of darkness, seeking safety.

He went to the black tent of the tribal chief in order to seek his protection. The old chief took the young Arab in. The chief assured him that he would be safe until the matter could be settled legally.

The next day, the young man's pursuers arrived, demanding the murderer be turned over to them. They would see that justice would prevail in their own way. 'But I have given my word,' protested the chief.

'But you don't know whom he killed!' they countered.

'I have given my word,' the chief repeated.

'He killed your son!' one of them blurted out. The chief was deeply and visibly shaken with his news. He stood speechless with his head bowed for a long time. The accused and the accusers as well as curious onlookers waited breathlessly. What would happen to the young man? Finally, the old man raised his head. 'Then he shall become my son,' he informed them, 'and everything I have will one day be his.'"

The relator of the story concluded, "The young man certainly didn't deserve such generosity. And that, of course, is the point." **"Love in its purest form is beyond comprehension. No one can merit it. It is**

**freely given. It is agape, the love of God.”** “Look to the cross. At the cross we encounter love in its purest form.” (PAUSE) (King Duncan, Collected Sermons, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com))

Remember how The Word brought Light to humanity? Jesus also affirmed that, as he went on to explain to Nicodemus, why some refuse to accept the Light – reject God’s Agape Love embodied in the Son of God.

***Jesus said, “The Light came into the world. Yet, people loved the dark rather than the Light because their actions were evil. People who do what is wrong hate the Light and don’t come to the Light. They don’t want their actions to be exposed. But people who do what is true come to the Light so that the things they do for God may be clearly seen.”***

Our “Loving Joy” needs to be repeatedly and resoundingly shared with others through our words and actions, so others will also come to have the Light – the Joy which accompanies the recognition we are Agape Loved by our Creator – our Divine Parent. One way is to celebrate and sing the Christmas Carol, “Joy to the World”. But it is even more important, if our

lives demonstrate – we know and live the Truth – **God Agape Loved us in Jesus Christ and continues to Agape Love us every day!** We are called to reveal that by having a changed perspective, which seeks to live and share Joy – turning negative things into new possibilities of agape love.

**Let us rejoice and resoundingly declare and show the Loving Joy we have because of what God has done for us in God's Own Son, Jesus Christ! Amen.**