

JOY IN UNION IN THE LORD JESUS

Hear the Word of God for this third Sunday of Advent, with our thoughts centered by the following translated verse:

Yet blessed remains the one if he might not be tripped up by Me.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Joy in the Lord is the theme for this week. The color of the Church has shifted from the purple of mourning and royalty to the Rose of Joy. Our Advent penitential emphasis is interrupted this week as Joy breaks into the Church as she awaits the coming of her Beloved. For us, at this service it is a great day to celebrate joy in union in the Lord Jesus, as God has united Hank and Louise into one-flesh in the bonds of holy matrimony.

So, this is a Sunday in which you are free to Rejoice, for you know the Creator God Who desires to restore His Creation has come, is coming and will come on the Last Day. He has brought forgiveness to this couple, and united them in Himself through His Word. Your proof that is a day in which to rejoice was given to the Baptizer some 20 centuries before the Kruses even met. Our biblical reasons for rejoicing were given by Jesus to John's followers –

*blind men continue to see; and lame men continue to walk;
leprous men are continually being cleansed; and deaf men continue to hear;
and dead men are being raised; and poor men are being gospelized.²*

To that today, we would add the evidence that two particular sinners have been pronounced clean. The bride today wore white last week

¹ *Matthew 11:6.*

² *Matthew 11:5.*

as God, through the Water and Word at her baptism showed her to be His new Creation.

It is the baptismal foundation of the cleansing Word of God through which, in this fallen creation, people are given God's reasons in which to find their joy. This is the time of year when the hustle of Christmas shopping, the rush to count down the days until the gifts are given, seems to consume many lives. Yet you who have the hope, peace, and joy of Advent are free to find some respite in God's gifts of Word and Sacraments.

To that end, in order to help the Church remain on the base which only is realized in the Lord Jesus Christ, we prayed together: *we beseech You to rule and govern our hearts by Your Holy Spirit...*³ We who are surrounded by the darkness and gloom of this fallen world need His Light in order to witness anew God's visitation of salvation in Christ. That is why the readings this week illuminated for us the coming of Christ to bring light into the darkness of sin. In Him is our joy. In Christ alone will be your joy in the new union He is establishing for you.

People are searching for the Light who will always be there to show them hope, peace and joy in their lives. The need for that enlightening, which every human has whether he or she admits it, is appropriately addressed for us this Advent season. In this time of lights and colors, we are reminded of the glorious shining Light, upon which the household of the Faith is illumined, that is, the Word of God. How then, are you doing in displaying the reasons for the hope, peace and joy you have in Christ to those around you?

To those who are here, the union of one man and one woman

³ Collect for Advent III, Gaudete.

by God is a good display of God's grace. Yet, outside these walls if your testimony of the Love of God in Christ Jesus is not going well, repent. That is: don't just sorrow over your sins, but turn from them and walk in the Light of the Season! You are free to give witness to that which God has done here this afternoon. How He has taken two, forgiven them their sins, and granted them a new, clean life. Restored in Christ, they will walk forth in hope, with the peace of God and the joy of knowing that their sins are removed as far as the East is from the West.

As our Old Testament reading for the week reminds us, the Word of the Lord that stands forever brings true joy to the believer. However, the Word can also bring an humbling and frightening illumination upon anyone who has wandered away from the grace of God. Deeds done in secret come to sight as the light of the Word shines upon them. As we remain in the Light of the Word of God, the good that God does through us will be seen, and the bad we do will be burned away.

In comparison to the Word, nothing lasts forever. All the great accomplishments of mankind: the Twin Towers of New York, the pyramids of Egypt, the Great Wall of China, not even the longest of marriages, none of them have been permanent. The greatest accomplishments of man and woman wither and fade over time.

This truth is shown for us in today's readings, as God's Word declares:

*Behold, I continue to send My angel before Your face,
which one will make ready Your way.⁴*

The Word of the Lord foretold an angel, in this case, a human messenger. He would "cry out" to announce the coming of the

⁴ Matthew 11:10b.

Anointed One of God, the Christ. That means he was to proclaim news that was for all the people, just like newspaper boys did in our country in the days before television and radio. The prophesied messenger was to lift up his voice and proclaim, not his opinions, but the Word of the Lord. This newsie could not make up his own message. He merely called out the headlines:

*Behold! Adonai YHWH with might comes –
and His arm is ruling for Him!
Behold! His reward is with Him –
and His recompense is before Him.⁵*

Recompense in this case means: to make amends for a loss. What was lost? The very image of God in Adam's fall was lost, and only a shadow remained – that of the physical body. Even that which was once a marriage sealed in the God-declared very good Creation, fell into a dim image of what it was before Eve was deceived and Adam fell into sin. The recompense promised by God in our text is the restoration of the spiritual nature, the New Man, given with the Water and the Word. That many of our number witnessed last week as Louise was drowned and rose to new life in Christ in Holy Baptism.

Do you see a tie in that John the Baptizer's ministry? He was the Voice that came to proclaim God's Word. That brought forth a baptism into repentance. The Coming One Who followed John brings the baptism of forgiveness.

Did John then know exactly Who the Coming One was? You who are the Church know the answer to this from John's response to his own proclamation. That is to say that he was given to announce the coming of the One greater than he. With Christian clarity, you know that the angel

⁵ Isaiah 40:10.

who went before the Face of the Lord was named John. He proclaimed the Word of the coming of the Christ to people who sat in deep darkness, lost in the wilderness of sin. And yet, even he, proclaiming the Light to come, and his disciples, would not know that Jesus was that Light until Jesus showed, through the enduring Word, that He was the Coming One.

For this reason, the rose of Advent, the pink of this wedding Feast, serves to remind everyone who beholds it to not rejoice just that –

*blind men continue to see; and lame men continue to walk;
leprous men are continually being cleansed; and deaf men continue to hear;
and dead men are being raised; and poor men are being gospelized.⁶*

We rejoice that our Christ has come. We need the hope, peace and joy that proceeds from the salvation that God has given us in Christ Jesus.

To get us to that reality daily, as Christians remain in the Word, the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins through the Law. The "breath" of God the Creator, pervades the creation, generates life, sustains life, and...destroys sin that takes away life. All humans sin, for we are sinners, created in the image of our father, Adam. Because of sin and its effects, all the things of this life, including marriages sometimes, wither and fade. Yet the Word of the Lord stands forever, even as it is reflected in this afternoon's theme text:

Blessed remains the one if he might not be tripped up by Me.⁷

There is hope, peace and joy offered in Jesus' words. The promise of God's blessing remains on we who, though cast down by the Law, are lifted up by the Good News of Jesus. Our good works are not those things which sustain us. Not even the good confession of marriage of

⁶ Matthew 11:5.

⁷ Matthew 11:6.

those whose sins are removed is enough to preserve us into eternity.

Rather, it is the scandal of our Bridegroom Jesus – the Cross – that bears up the faithful. We, the ones who have received amends God made for our sins on the Cross, are free to lean upon the cross in faith. We may have joy to place our sin-burdens there and to walk away forgiven and uplifted.

That is why, for more than 14 centuries, the Church has chosen to remember the season of Advent. In this special time, we recall that the Lord has come. Through His Means of Grace, we know that the Lord comes. From the Word we know and believe that the day of His final coming will be when those whose bodies sleep in death will awaken. Jesus gave ample proof of that before He died to remove death's eternal sting.

Therefore, Advent is a time for penitence – for sorrowing over and turning from sins. Yet it is a time for joy, for the Word of the Lord has carried our sins to the cross and the grave. Jesus has risen from the dead to display to us His victory.

In His resurrection, the faithful have the sure and certain promise that the Lord's return will find us raised from the dead: the sleepers will awaken. Those who have died in Christ will be given glory greater than the greatest triumph of man, that is, the glory of God. This glory will be eternal. There is reason for joy as the Church again awaits the coming of Jesus.

Joy is sure and certain because God Himself, Jesus the Messiah, slept the sleep of death and was raised from the dead, and ascended into glory. He is the first to be raised to glory. Because of that, we who live and die in Him will be raised to live with Him forever. We who freely confessed Christ Jesus as the One prophesied Who brings sight to the blind,

restores the lame to walk, cleanses the impure to enable them to approach the only Holy and Living God, brings the hearing of the Gospel to those whose ears were stopped by their sins, raises the dead to life in Him, and continues to bring Good News to the poor, we who continued in the confession that all these things are the marks of Christ Jesus, will be given the blessings of God. As we remain in His Word, we will not be tripped by the scandal of the Cross, but renewed and refreshed in its promises, we will rejoice in Jesus' coming. On the Last Day, we in Christ, and we alone, will shine, with more joy than Hank and Louise today in this union in Christ. We will, as the light of the stars, reflect the glory of the Living Lord.

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ
Jesus**

Advent III, (One-year series)

Wedding Feast of Christ Jesus for Hank and Louise Kruse

Psalm 85; Isaiah 40:1-11; I Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 11:2-11

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Pastor Michael H. Morhouse

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