

## ***“Joy is Relational”***

Sermon for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Decatur, Georgia

Season of Advent, Joy Sunday, December 14, 2014

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### **Holy Scriptures: Psalm 126**

*A Harvest of Joy, A Song of Ascents*

*1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.” 3 The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.*

*4 Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. 5 May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. 6 Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*

### Sermon

You must have noticed when you went to the pharmacy the empty shelves.

No more Aleve or Tylenol to be had;

Motrin and Robitussin, gone.

Rumor has it that the members and friends of First Christian Church of Decatur

cleaned out supplies of pain relievers for 2.5 miles around.

Lord, we are bone weary yet our hearts are glad.

We made and sold to our church and local neighbors

around 300 beautiful wreaths, mailbox covers, and swags.

Our fair city turned out big time,

buying all 756 Christmas trees in a world record setting eleven days,

which is even less than last year's 13 day sale.

I told that fact to someone and he said, "The city government bought all your trees?"

Let me clarify: our city's citizens have shown up and shone their generosity.

At this pace we may soon be competing with God's Creation record of six days.

At least the Lord got a day of rest, which is, of course, today.

So please catch your breath and breathe.

We are extremely grateful for the support of our wider community,

and we are honored to be able to work and play together so well as a church team.

Saturday's Elf Workshop for children was a hoot,

with young people from 2 to 5<sup>th</sup> grade enjoying the festive atmosphere and crafts.

On Tuesday evening our Handbell Choir will perform for the glory of God

at the Charles Drew Charter School alongside the school choirs,

under the direction of our own fabulous Dir. of Music William Garner.

Next Saturday we are going to go out into the surrounding community

to lift up Christmas Carols that sing of the birth of Jesus.

We can appreciate that it takes a lot of teamwork to pull this off,

and to do so with a smile and a hug and an attitude of hospitality and joy

makes all the difference.

Way to go, my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Last week while showing a family around the Christmas Tree lot on our church lawn,

we got to visiting about the significance of the four Sundays of Advent.

As we compared liturgical notes,

our conversation delved into the meaning of joy.

The daughter of the family asked me if I knew what joy stood for.

Before I could get a word out she said, *“Joy means Jesus and Others before Yourself.”*

Yes, indeed; there is much joy whenever we place Jesus and others before our self.

Joy is contingent on our relationships.

Joy is relational.

When we place God and our neighbor before us,

when we think about others and the God who made us all in love,

then we tap into that blessed gift of gladness we call joy.

Joy rises out of our faith in God.

Joy rises out of our connections with friends and family.

Joy rises out of our sacrifices we make when we place our neighbor before ourselves.

Ever heard the name Gale Sayers?

(I know, I know, ancient sports history.)

Gale Sayers played tailback for the Chicago Bears football team way back in the day.

Sayers played the game with passion;

he lived his life with joy.

He found great joy in his relationships with his Lord and his family and friends.

The story of his friendship with his teammate Brian Piccolo

was made into a movie called “Brian’s Song.”

(Wanna see a dude cry? Watch it with him.)

Well, Gale Sayer’s memoir is entitled “I am Third.”

He wrote, *“God is first, my friends are second, and I am third.”*

Put God first in your life, and discover the power of joy.

If there is anything we have gleaned from the story of Creation,  
from the Promise of the New Covenant,  
from the Birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem,  
from the Nature and Nurture of Jesus of Nazareth,  
and from the Resurrection of Jesus into Life  
Everlasting,  
it is that God takes deep and abiding  
joy  
in God's relationship with  
you.

You see, joy is relational.

God, who loves you, who made you, who holds you close, forever and ever,  
restores your fortunes, transforms your life and relationships,  
changes your circumstances for the better,  
and turns your tears into shouts of joys.

Listen to the Word from Psalm 126, which is known as A Harvest of Joy:

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.  
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy;  
then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for  
them."*

*The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.*

*Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb.*

*May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.*

*Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,*

*shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*

The Psalmist firms that God has something to say

about our past, our present, and our future.

Nothing we ever did or are doing or will do is beyond the scope of God.

As we remember God in our past, we have this joy.

Nothing we did was beyond the scope of God's grace.

When you reflect on the story of your life,

when you look back over the miles and the journey,

you can see the moments and experiences when God was present,

when God restored you and you rejoiced.

As we receive God in our present, we have this joy.

Nothing we are doing is beyond the scope of God's grace.

When you look around now,

taking stock in who you are and all that is going on,

trust that God is with you,

to hold you close and restore your life and meaning.

God sees you, knows you, cares for you, came to earth to be with you.

The Psalmist testifies and we acknowledge that

where we are now is not where we will always be,

especially if it is not a healthy place.

As we anticipate God in our future, we have this joy.

Nothing we will do or become shall be beyond the scope of God's grace.

When you look ahead, as the Psalmist did,

you and I can see with the eyes of faith that Jesus Christ is already there.

Joy rises out of this faith.

Jesus and Others before Yourself

Here's a story called "The Christmas Scale."

*My momma told me something when I was growing up  
that has forever changed my life.*

*She played the piano in our little church ...for 37 years.*

*She tried to teach me the piano, but I wasn't very good.*

*She would teach me the names of the notes,*

*what a major key is, what a minor key is.*

*She tried to teach me musical theory, but I was just bored.*

*Then one day she told me that the best news in the world  
is found by playing a simple scale on the piano.*

*I had no idea what she meant*

*So she told me to play an eight note scale on the piano.*

*So I did.*

*[C D E F G A B C]*

*I said, "How is that good news?"*

*She said I had played it incorrectly, that I needed to play it the other way.*

*So I did.*

*[C B A G F E D C]*

*Again, I said, "How is that good news?"*

*And she said I played it the right way but I needed to add the pauses.*

*The pauses?*

*She said, "The pauses.*

*Add them on the first, second, fourth, sixth, seventh, and last note."*

*Now I was frustrated.*

*I said, "How can 8 notes with random pauses be the best news in the world?*

*Then I got up, walked away and went outside.*

*Frankly I didn't care what she was talking about;*

*I didn't like playing the piano anyway.*

*Well, years later my mamma got sick and passed away.*

*As I was thinking about her, I remembered what she told me about the piano.*

*Not only that, I still remembered the notes she told me to pause.*

*The first, second, fourth, sixth, seventh, and last note*

*So I sat down at her piano and played the scale with the pauses.*

*[C B A G F E D C]*

*("Joy to the world, the Lord is come!")*

*And that's when I realized the Good News she was talking about."*

We can relate.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*

To listen to "The Christmas Scale" please go to: <http://youtu.be/rNDtHdG5mVk>

## **Communion Invitation**

In a few moments we will gather to share in the Lord's Supper. Advent is a liturgical season to help us prepare for the coming of the Christ child. There is a delightful sense of irony in this worship service because at the same time that we are sitting in the Upper Room we're quietly drawing near to the Manger. For when we break the Bread of Life and drink from the Cup of the New Covenant we remember the very One whose birth we await. Yet isn't it always the case that we await the One whose life and death we remember? Communion grounds our souls for life in the Already and the Not Yet. Prepare yourself. God is nigh.