

December 17, 2017

SERMON

Yesterday I was trying to clean and decorate my house for Christmas and prepare for some company. The song “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” came on the seasonal hits radio station I was listening to. Then later at evening worship the same song was also featured. So consequently, I had it stuck on repeat in my head for nearly 24 hours now. I’m quite terrible at remembering some lyrics in fact I often tend to invent my own. So, the verses of the song did not stick just the refrain. Rejoice, rejoice. Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel.

Upon hearing this several times, I began to ponder on the word rejoice. What does it mean? How often do I rejoice? Do I even do it at all? I thought this again later in the evening when I went caroling to a nearby nursing home. I hadn’t gone caroling since I was a little child. And I probably would not have necessarily thought of going if not for my boss telling me to. I had forgotten what it felt like to go and put a smile on weak and tired faces or to stand in community with my friends and strangers. It was a wonderful evening and at the end one of the other carolers said, “Doesn’t this just make you feel good?” Yes, it did. I felt great after. I knew we had made plenty of the resident’s nights and maybe even their week. Rejoice, rejoice. That’s what we were doing as we sang our Christmas tunes. Sharing the love and spreading some cheer.

The English major in me loves to analyze literature, poems, and songs seeking for some hidden meaning. So, I would like to think this song, repeats the word “rejoice” twice because of the words’ two meanings. First, we have rejoice or to feel joy or great delight. Then we have rejoice to give joy to someone or something. I will admit I just discovered this dual meaning last night but now that I’m aware of it, I

can't stop thinking about it. Here I always thought about rejoicing as a way of sharing my joy, my happiness, or thanksgivings with others, particularly with God. But I never thought of it as simply the feeling of joy or happiness. Of course, that makes perfect sense. How can you share your joy or happiness if you have not felt it first?

I think that when I envision it in both these ways, I am able to find more times when I am rejoicing. But still am I doing it always as our Epistle reading said? I know especially during this crazy hectic holiday season, I am most definitely not. Each day my to-do list seems to double. I am squeezing every last hour out of the day. We are approaching the latter part of Advent and I am still stuck in disbelief that we are already here. I'm a bit overwhelmed by the busyness of my life. It seems I am caught in the tangles of my wilderness. Even though I try and continue to try not to get caught up in it, not to get caught in the daily rush of life.

I have failed. I have tried to do more but in reality, I have probably done less. I am disappointed. I expected something different. I imagined the Levites and the priests in our Gospel reading may have experienced a similar feeling. Each time they questioned John, they were told something probably different than what they had expected. They may have also been disappointed. The Messiah was not here yet. John was not the prophet either. Likewise, perhaps John too was a bit disappointed in how the events played out. Here, if the priests and Levites would just let him talk, and stop asking all of their questions, maybe they would get the answers they needed. It seems our lives are constantly filled with expectation, ones that are far different from our realities. Often the realities are even less than we expected or imagined.

I think of all the times I have tried to make a recipe. I have followed every step, but my end product ends up looking nothing like the

picture. Or when I was a child and I pictured life as a grown-up. Driving my own car, eating all the candy and dessert I wanted, freedom. I neglected to picture bills, calories, or pretty much any type of responsibility. I'm not sure if you have seen the images floating around online, the ones that have two side-by-side pictures, and the caption that reads "expectation vs. reality." There are thousands of these. One for every scenario you can imagine. And in each one the reality is a very far off version of expectation. Each one shares the feeling of disappointment, of being let down because things didn't go according to plan, according to the idea or the expectation. I think living in such a world of disappointment or failed expectations is hard not to just give up on having expectations at all. Why set up ourselves simply to be let down in the end. Yes of course then there are the times when the reality has blown away any expectations out of the water. But those seem to be rare almost even exceptions.

I think that's why now in Advent, in a season of the church that is completely dedicated to expecting, we may find ourselves lost in the wilderness. Perhaps we have given in to what we think the reality is. And have abandoned any idea of expectation or even anticipation. We don't want to be disappointed once again in our lives. We are forgetting though of course that the reality of the birth of Christ and the meaning it has for all of us is far greater and more amazing than anything we could ever expect.

Each year the season of Advent reminds me that no matter how much I plan or prepare, I'm not the one in control. God is and as we know anything and everything that God does is always far above and beyond our expectations. We must simply trust in him. Abandon our fears and disappointment and have complete faith in him. If you are like me you may still be thinking, I need to, I should be doing more. I want to actively be trusting in God. I think then back to the Epistle, to the song

O Come, O Come Emmanuel. Let us truly rejoice. And God's love, this final week of advent. Let us feel, experience, and then share our joy and happiness with the world.

Rejoice. Rejoice. Emmanuel shall come to Thee O Israel.