

December 21, 2008

Rejoice



Advent Devotional 2008 Fourth Week

Church of the Redeemer
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Rev. Karen Graham, Pastor

**Week of December 21, 2008
At Redeemer**

December 21:

8:30 a.m.	Active Redeemer Men
9:15 a.m.	Children's Choir Rehearsal
9:30 a.m.	Sunday School – Friendship Class
9:30 a.m.	Sunday School – Scripture Class
9:45 a.m.	Sunday School – Community Seekers
10:15 a.m.	Costuming for Pageant
11:00 a.m.	Worship and Pageant
11:30 a.m.	Sunday School (Grades K-5, after Christmas Pageant)
12:15 p.m.	Choir Rehearsal for Christmas Eve Service

December 22:

Prepare Ye The Way for the Lord!

December 23:

Prepare Ye The Way for the Lord!

December 24:

7:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Service - Fellowship Hall

December 25:

He is Born! Merry Christmas!

'Fourth Sunday of Advent'

Rejoice

(Read Isaiah 52:7-10 and Luke 2: 1-20)

Christ comes to us this day. With the angels we sing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven!"

Together we sing for joy!

A baby has been born in Bethlehem. With the shepherds, we kneel before the manger of hope.

Together we sing for joy!

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to us, 'Your God reigns'.

Together we sing for joy!

Sing out with praise! Hope has come to us: to poor and rich, to old and young, to the infinite sky and the ravaged earth, to people of all nations and all hues of color.

Together we sing for joy!

Break forth together in singing! Jesus is born!

Together we sing for joy! Christ is born! Glory to God! Amen.

(Litany by Beth Richardson found in the *Jubilee issue of Alive Now*)

Submitted by: Pastor Karen Graham

'Fourth Monday of Advent – Morning Reading'

Rejoice

When Steve and I bought our first house, I had no experience taking care of a yard. I had spent my adolescence in a house with acres of land that hired help maintained: a half dozen gardens, a front lawn edged with bushes and apple trees, and a back yard that meandered up Pinnacle Hill to a grass volleyball court surrounded by wildflowers. My sole responsibility had been to rake leaves and shovel snow.

Now I was on my own with our new half-acre lot. The grass was choked with weeds, the evergreen taxus had grown to fifteen-foot tentacles, and thorny vines had enveloped and killed most of the

property line bushes. I grabbed a saw and began a drastic round of pruning. As I inspected the property, I noticed that only the north side of our house was free of rampant overgrowth. There lay a 6-foot by 30-foot strip of periwinkle, a ground cover that had suppressed all weeds. All except one, that is. Six inches from our house grew an eight-foot silver maple, a sapling that was destined to reach sixty feet and destroy our foundation in the process. I promptly cut it down.

Six months later, I discovered the maple had sprouted several trunks that were half as tall as the original tree. The sorcerer's apprentice was out to get me. But instead of cutting them down, I cut each trunk back to three feet in height. Over time and more pruning, the maple tree turned into a slow-growing bush that only needed occasional trimming. It never flowered or set seed, didn't block our view, and wouldn't get big enough to invade our foundation. "I think we can live with a maple bush," I said to my family.

One day my daughter skipped around to the north side of the house to tell me I had a phone call.

She froze in her tracks when she saw my face. "Mom," she said, "what's wrong."

"Our maple," I said. "It's dead." I looked again in shock at the withered branches and brown leaves.

"It died because I wouldn't let it be a tree."

I picked up my clippers and slowly followed Lara to the house. The person calling me had given up and hung up, but I didn't care. I was numb with guilt over what I had done. As spring warmed into summer and summer cooled into fall, one question after another came to mind as I worked in the yard. What other things have I done to harm God's creation? What have I killed through neglect because I thought it wasn't important? And isn't my child – and everyone else I know – just like that maple tree, something created to be what God plans it to be – not what I want it to be? How can I stop controlling things and just let everyone and everything unfold as they should?

It took time to find answers to my questions. I still haven't reached a place where I always remember to stand back and not interfere. But outwardly and inwardly I see and feel a difference. Our yard is full of trees, bushes, and plants that feed birds and other creatures. The grass is still weedy, but not because of neglect; I don't use herbicides because they would kill my worms and butterflies. Birds come to our windows to tell us the feeders are low. Neighborhood children bring us orphaned baby animals to care for. Camp Aldersgate teens write me to say, "Because of you, I've stopped killing bugs. I try harder to make room for God's creatures, whether they are beautiful or ugly. They all have a purpose. Even if it's something gross like eating stuff that rots."

Inwardly I think I'm more accepting of my family and friends, neighbors and cultures. As I let go of my need to control and continue to grow in acceptance, I find I worry less. For someone once nicknamed "worry wart" by her father, this is a big change. But most important of all, I can look past my fears and rejoice – rejoice in my life and this world that is such a precious gift, rejoice in a God who loves me and all who share this world with me. I did nothing to deserve such happiness, yet God has chosen to bless me with so much. For this I am so grateful. For this I will always rejoice.

Kate Klaber

'Fourth Monday of Advent – Evening Reading'

I Chose Heaven

I've been told that a man was offered an opportunity to take a preview of what it would be like in heaven and hell. As a matter of fact, from first appearances the places were very similar. The weather was great, no headaches or aches and pains, no worries, and everyone took care of their own business. The food was extraordinary. Actually, there was an all you can eat buffet that defied descriptions—each meal was like an elaborate banquet. One only had to imagine what was wanted and it appeared.

In each place, I noticed something rather strange and unique about the eating utensils; they had extremely long handles. Those people in Satan's land were starving; the food was before them but could not be eaten because of the long handled utensils. Obviously, in spite of apparently having it made, they could not enjoy the paradise around them. The people in heaven, God's land, were sitting around the banquet table very happy and satisfied. Those folks figured out how to solve the long handle dilemma. They fed each other!

What a day of rejoicing when we as God's people can figure out when we feed each other the goodness God lays before us, everyone can celebrate and enjoy His blessings. That's how it was when this one man got a preview of in heaven. My prayer is that it be so on earth.

Anonymous

'Fourth Tuesday of Advent – Morning Reading'

A Sermon on Joy!

Reading: Psalm 126:2-5

Most dictionaries definition of joy to me is somewhat inadequate for those who make God their exceeding joy or have been touched by the joy he sees in us. One of the best things is the songs we sing of the fulfillment of a promise that was made thousands of years ago that have come to light. One of the many favorite is "Joy to the world the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King." Why wouldn't we celebrate the one who brings healing, redemption and salvation? What I mean to say, we should be expressing our joy everyday not just on Sundays or a couple of months out of the year; I know I can do better.

It seems that here in America probably the most blessed nation on earth, where most profess to be Christians, *after the designated season passes*, we take our joy and hope and put them up with the rest of the decorations in the closet, basement or attic until next year—locked up in a box somewhere.

Yes from this time on I am going to be intentional about keeping my joy with me at all times and not let go. I am not going to fool you or myself, it's going to be hard. Somewhere during the coming year someone is going to try to convince me that joy is represented by a dishwashing detergent; it can only be used in water and soon will be diluted. Or someone will try to make me feel joy is represented by a candy bar; once you put it in your mouth the joy melts away and soon is gone. But for me I have decided, it's a

certainty that a song that promises love in God Almighty or our Lord Jesus Christ is going to promise joy. I rejoice in this promise.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, the ultimate joy giver, thank you for being ever present in my life. Help me to rejoice always of your presence in my life.

Terry Stills

[The above is an excerpt from Terry's sermon, delivered December 14, 2008 at Shaffer Memorial UMC]

'Fourth Tuesday of Advent – Evening Reading'

Psalm 105::1-5

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,

make know his deeds among the peoples!

Sing to him, sing praises to him,

tell of all his wonderful works!

Glory in his holy name;

let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice!

Seek his presence continually!

Remember the wonderful works that he has done,

his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,

O offspring of Abraham his servant sons of Jacob, his chosen ones!

'Fourth Wednesday of Advent – Morning Reading'

Heart Breaking Gift Giving

*“For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son,
that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* John 3:16

I am anxious gift giver. I love buying gifts for my loved ones. But, I carefully think too much about those gifts, I look and look and change my mind many times, before I purchase a gift. Once it is

purchased and I know it is the right gift, I am anxious until the gift is received. I have actually lain awake at night, wondering how the gift will be received. Will they like it as much as I do? Will they enjoy or use it, or toss it aside and enjoy something else?

Some of this comes from the parental experience of giving gifts to my children, when they were young. I remember those Christmas mornings when I would give one of my boys a gift that I had carefully chosen, but feel disappointed that shortly after opening their gift they would be much more interested in the gift their brother had received, sort of tossing my special gift aside. Then there was the baby! We all remember that babies are often more fascinated with the wrapping paper or the box, than they are the precious gift that was inside and intended for them.

Those images have been in my mind as I am preparing for this Christmas. I am wondering about how God feels about the way we receive his gift. He prepared a beautiful gift for us; he sacrificed to give it to us. He gave us his son, out of his great love for us. Then we receive the gift and sometimes we toss him aside for store bought gifts that glitter, or move and make noise. Sometimes we are like babies, more interested in the wrappings of Christmas than the gift of Christmas. Sometimes we recognize the gift, even say thank you, but then set the gift aside to get on with the “more interesting” things that life has to offer us. I wonder if God has a grieving heart, and asks the angels, “Do you think they really liked my gift?” “Do you think they will receive him as an act of my love, or forget how much I love them?” “Do you think they will use my gift for the intended purpose of receiving eternal life, or will they choose to perish anyway?”

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus! Help me to receive him in the same way that you gave him, with great love. Forgive me when I toss Jesus aside and count my material gifts, as though they added up to riches.

Submitted by Rev. H. Daniel Drew

[Rev. Drew is the District Superintendent of the North Coast District UMC – so many times when he shares a devotion at staff meetings they are very powerful and thought provoking. He spoke the words one Tuesday at a staff meeting, it gave me pause to ponder his words in my heart]

'Fourth Wednesday of Advent – Evening Reading'

I Say Rejoice

Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: Let such as love thy salvation say continually The Lord Be Magnified.
Psalm 40:16 KJV

I rejoice that I have confidence in you at all times.
2 Corinthians 7:16 KJV

Submitted by Cheryl Dupree

My Advent Reflections

Devotional Nuggets for Advent 2008
by Pastor Karen Graham



Rejoice

I know that in the course of our lives we all probably do more crying than laughing. Or we keep silent even more than we either cry or laugh. I know the world's a tough place and that tender hearts get easily broken. I know that every thing and every body gets tired and worn-out. I know that evil surrounds us, and darkness is everywhere. I know there are hard decisions to make, and problems to contend with and consequences to bear. I know there is immense suffering and sorrow and sadness in our world. I know all that and so do you.

But I also know that an angel came to Mary one day and told her that with God nothing is impossible. With God nothing is impossible. Not an unlikely birth. Not a manger king. Not a resurrection. Not a church. Not peace. Not forgiveness. Not love. Not salvation. With God nothing is impossible. Not even joy. Not even joy. Can you dare to believe? Can you dare to rejoice? "WOW!" said Mary. "WOW! A baby for me? Let it be. My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior". Let it be for us, too. Rejoice!

'Christmas Day – Song'





Photograph by Bridgett Emerson

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King; let
Every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing, and
Heaven and nature sing, and
Heaven, and heaven, and nature sing. ♪
He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove the
Glories of his righteousness,
And wonders of his love, and
Wonders of his love, and
Wonders, wonders of his love.*

One of the most famous Lutheran pastors who ever lived was Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906 – 1945).

In one of his Christmas reflections, around 1929 or 1930, he wrote: We all come with different personal feelings to the Christmas festival. One comes with pure joy as he looks forward to this day of rejoicing, of friendships renewed, and of love. That is true of most children. Others look for a moment of peace under the Christmas tree, peace from the pressures of daily work. They want to dream of times and days long past. They want to forget all the unpleasant happenings around them and see the world only in the light of the Christmas tree; they want to hear the old Christmas carols. They long for this blessed forgetfulness. Others again approach Christmas with great apprehension.

It will be no festival of joy for them. Personal sorrow is painful, especially on this day for those whose loneliness is deepened at Christmas time. Human hearts feel emotions under the lights of the Christmas tree in so many different ways. And it is surely right that each of us should look around at the outside world for a while.

Perhaps, this year, something wonderful will occur that will help us to celebrate Christmas. Before our eyes stand the crowds of the unemployed, the millions of children throughout the world in hunger and distress, the hunger in China, the oppressed in India, and those in our own unhappy land. All eyes tell us of helplessness and despair. And despite it all, Christmas comes. Whether we wish it or not, whether we are sure or not, we must hear the words once again: Christ the Savior is here! The world that Christ comes to save is our fallen and lost world. None other." (Bonhoeffer's Works, Vol. 10 pgs. 582-87)

'Christmas Day – In Memory of Friends'

Someone once said, “ *you should know how to receive a gift. When someone gives you a gift, receive it as a sign of friendship. Don't focus on the gift. It's not about the stuff; it's about the person who gave the gift. When someone supports you in your efforts to serve God, it's cause for double rejoicing. You rejoice not only in the friendship but you rejoice in the gifts they give...treasure your friendships and the value they have in your life.*”

Since June, Phil and I have experienced the deaths of friends and family that we treasured. The moments have been bittersweet but a cause for us to have double rejoicing; the friendships and gift by each person.

Emory Lynch - gift, wisdom and knowledge

Mary Barkey – gift, truthfulness and justice

Mary Bell - (an aunt) gift, love and generosity

Dick Cramer – gift, knowledge of music

Catherine Woody – gift, gentleness and patience

Art Lipton – gift, graciousness and giving

Jerry Jeffries – gift, encouragement and hospitality

Bessie Lynch – gift, wisdom and openness

Connie Whitmore – (a cousin) gift, love of Jehovah, family and photography

Prayer: Most good and gracious God, what a privilege to be able to rejoice on this wonderful day of the birth of your son Jesus Christ. I remember also, the double blessings that you have given me in friendships and the gifts they brought with their friendships. **Amen.**

Submitted by Beverly Holland

'Christmas Evening – Prayer'

Not Only Christmas Day

Lord, this is my prayer
Not only on Christmas Day
But until I see You face to face
May I live my life this way:

So wile this world rejoices
And celebrate Your birth,
I treasure You, the greatest gift
Unequaled in Your worth.

Just like the baby Jesus
I ever hope to be,
Resting in Your loving arms
Trusting in Your sovereignty.

I long to hear the same words
That welcomed home Your Son,
“Come, good and faithful servant,
Your Master says, “Well done.”

And like the growing Christ child
In wisdom daily learning,
May I ever seek to know You
With my mind and spirit yearning.

And may heaven welcome others
Who will join with me in praise
Because I lived for Jesus Christ
Not only Christmas Day.

Like the Son so faithful
Let me follow in Your light,
Meek and bold, humble and strong
Not afraid to face the night.

```Mary Fairchild, author

Nor cowardly to suffer  
And stand for truth alone,  
Knowing that Your kingdom  
Awaits my going home.

Not afraid to sacrifice  
Though great may be the cost,  
Mindful how You rescued me  
From broken-hearted loss.

Like my risen Savior  
The babe, the child, the Son,  
May my life forever speak

Of who You are and all You've done.