



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Third Sunday of Advent, December 13, 2020

This Joy I Have

by Garland F. Pierce

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

61:1 The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;

61:2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

61:3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion-- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

61:4 They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

61:8 For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

61:9 Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

61:11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

At Shiloh AME Church in McCormick, South Carolina, USA, Mrs. Bertha Harrison Bell would often sing, “This joy that I have, the world didn’t give it to me! The world didn’t give it; and, the world can’t take it away!” She led the choir in singing this declaration as well as the congregation during moments of testimony or if there was a quiet pause in the worship service.

Isaiah’s prophecy links joy and gladness with justice and righteousness. These words from Isaiah come to the people of Israel after a period of exile, a time of separation from home and an experience of suffering and oppression. Isaiah’s good news is that God, the lover of justice, will establish justice in the land and will restore life. Jesus, in the gospel of Luke, takes the scroll of Isaiah and reads these same words in the synagogue, identifying his ministry in this same spirit of liberation and reconciliation.

The world often denies freedom and even human worth. Oppressive forces in the world cause exile, discrimination, and even unnecessary suffering and death. Such forces and impulses have little to no interest in true peace, justice, or joy nor any real capacity to offer these to those most in need of them. But God! Isaiah’s God, Israel’s God, Miss Bertha’s God promises justice and peace. Our God promises the joy that results from justice and peace, the joy that only God can give. This same God promises spirit and power that we can receive that give us the strength to work for peace, justice, and restoration. Justice work is not easy; but, with God’s help and God’s spirit, we receive salvation, strength, endurance, wisdom, and joy. Advent reminds us that Jesus came to bring these good gifts to the world. Advent encourages us that we are not alone in our struggles or in the work to which God has called each of us who are go by the names believers and disciples.

Advent teaches us the reasons for joy!

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share (write down)—Reflecting on the scripture and on the questions: This Advent, to what work of justice is God calling you? Where have you found joy this Advent?

PRAY:

Dear God, We know you to be a lover of justice and a giver of peace and salvation. The things we do each day fill our minds completely, or so it seems, and we find it hard to give you the space to do those works of grace you long to do in us. So come to us in a moment, unexpectedly, and let the Spirit lift our bound souls above our worldly anxieties to heavenly places of joy and wonder, love and praise. Take us there, dear Jesus, at any time of your choosing and at every instant of our need; and may our lives give testimony to the transforming power of even just a moment spent with you. May our joy be evident and our actions lead to justice and peace. AMEN

Adapted from: <http://www.netdevotions.org/A%20Isaiah%2061,1-4.pdf>

ACT:

1. Based on your reflections from the TALK section, make an Advent action plan as to how you will move forward in your work of justice this Advent? This Advent, how will you share the joy of the Lord? Make that action plan as well. This Advent, do what you can; help others and yourself by practicing social distancing as much as possible, washing your hands often, and wearing face covering to help prevent the spread of COVID-19—See: <http://www.amehealth.org>.

2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.

3. Check out some other Advent Resources for worship and study:

AMEC Publishing House (Sunday School Union). <http://www.iamame.org/worship-resources-2/>

Advent Daily Devotional from the AME, AMEZ, and CME Departments of Christian Education (Kindle version):

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B08M6FGLHC?pf_rd_r=VVMNB09AMKMDNH1EDGJS&pf_rd_p=40eb7df6-3345-4945-93b1-96c5bd9a116d

Song:

O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing AMEC Hymnal, #1

1. O for a thou-sand tongues to sing
My great Re-deem-er's praise,
The glo-ries of my God and King,
The tri-umphs of His grace!
2. My gra-cious Mas-ter and my God,
As-sist me to pro-claim,
To spread thro' all the earth a-broad
The hon-ors of Thy name.
3. Je-sus! the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sor-rows cease,
'Tis mu-sic in the sin-ner's ears,
'Tis life, and health, and peace.
4. He breaks the power of can-celed sin,
He sets the pris-oner free;
His blood can make the foul-est clean;
His blood a-vailed for me.
5. He speaks and listen-ing to His voice,
New life the dead re-ceive;
The mourn-ful, bro-ken hearts re-joice;
The hum-ble poor, be-lieve.
6. *Hear Him, ye deaf, his praise, ye dumb,
Your loos-ened tongues em-ploy;
Ye blind, be-hold your Sav-ior come;
And leap, ye lame, for joy.
A-men.

*Words by Charles Wesley, 1707-1788

Some skip or alter this verse because they feel that it does not reflect the sensitivities needed related to disabilities. Some hymnals include the following verse:

Glory to God, and praise and love
Be ever, ever given
By saints below and saints above
The church in earth and heaven.

Alternative Arrangement: *O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing* by Rev. Dr. Roderick D. Belin:
<https://youtu.be/idvWidCl6eM>

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place an Advent wreath, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric (purple or royal blue) to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.