

## **Joy to the World:**

Sermon for Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December, Advent Three. Vicar Joyce Marcon  
*Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11, Psalm 126, I Thessalonians 5: 16-24, John1: 6-8, 19-28.*

Remember when sayings were popular that began: Joy is.....

The theme of joy is not uncommon in the scriptures. Psalm 126, is a song of joy, read as pilgrims ascended the last climb of the Jerusalem hills as they gathered to celebrate their religious feasts. (Let us read it together.)

This week a parishioner, Barbara Grantham died. While I am saddened to think we will not see her again in Church or the Op. Shop or at the Selwyn Centre I find my thoughts rising to her sense of humour, her ability to make a cheerful observation, to find joy in the present.

Two weeks ago, not being sure how well she was, Barbara observed she was content with her life, her family, her faith, church and friends. She joked about being delighted with her new skill of texting for she could keep in touch with cricket score.

She knew she was loved by God. In the midst of frailty and uncertainty over her state of health Barbara still reflected the joy of life.

I wonder what gives you joy; perhaps it's the people you meet, a hobby, a voluntary service, pets, your faith, the garden, your work?

Personally I find joy in the garden. What a delight it was recently to suddenly have an old fashioned rose bursting forth having sat dormant since arriving unexpectedly a year or so past... I wonder how it made a home there. I have found another one in the vege garden.

Where are they from? Who knows – but what a simple joy to find them.

Because we are having a holiday from cat ownership at present we are seeing more parent birds feeding their young on the Vicarage lawn. It's a delight to see these mothers nurturing their tiny fledglings. These kinds of joyous discoveries take time to observe and require moments of stillness. Can we be too busy to see the joy around us?

Isaiah 61 speaks of actions that give joy. Jesus preached from this chapter in his first sermon recorded in Luke 4: 18-19. In the original setting King Cyrus had released the people of God to return home, to rebuild the city and temple of Jerusalem. Note some of the activities to change their lives. Good news is proclaimed with freedom. Broken hearts are bound up and mended. Prisoners are released, comfort is given. All these actions release folk from captivity. People were anointed with the oil of joy and given lovely crowns of flowers and greenery. There is restoration and rebuilding. There is rejoicing and everlasting joy – something indeed to be celebrated.

The other theme for today is John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. His was a strong voice proclaiming the advent of Jesus' ministry to follow his own.

This week my voice has been reduced to a husky whisper – a touch of some minor infection. It is a most inconvenient nuisance and in no way suitable for the proclamation of news.

In the Bible story of voice-loss it was John the Baptist's father Zechariah who lost his voice for nine long months, so I've had a tiny insight into what it must have been like for him.

Remember too that Zechariah had a significant role leading worship and in pastoral care. He has my utmost sympathy.

The Gospel of John contains many 'I am' titles for Jesus. You will recall 'I am the light of the world'; 'I am the good shepherd' as just two examples. For John the Baptist his titles were more in the 'I am not' category as he repeatedly denied he was the Messiah or the Christ or Elijah – only a forerunner, a messenger, a preparer of the way.

We hear about his life and his ministry with a clear emphasis that he was not the Messiah the people were looking for.

The Gospel starts with grand poetry. Verse 6 is a contrast. There was a man sent from God whose name was John and all kinds of people came to see him. In the interrogation of John by priests and Levites from Jerusalem he responds by describing himself as the voice of one

crying in the wilderness. At the time of the writing of the gospel of John, John the Baptist and Jesus were seen by some to be in competition with each other. In this early chapter again and again we hear of from John not only of his subordinate status but the identification of Jesus as the one for whom he had ministered.

Remember when newly pregnant Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth who was pregnant with John and how Elizabeth's babe in the womb leapt for joy at the presence of the unborn Jesus?

All these years later John was to bear joyous witness, to prepare a road for Jesus by baptising people as they started a new way of living. He did not consider himself worthy even to untie Jesus sandals – a task considered the most menial and unpleasant role anyone could take on. The call to us today is to bring joy to the heart of God by witnessing to the person of Jesus, simply by being in ourselves naturally and spiritually a person of joy in attitude and action. The sheer joy of life itself is reason enough. Joy is a gift transcending outward circumstances and bringing an inner passion for life, a capacity to enjoy the delights of others, a proclamation from us that declares 'joy to the world' far beyond the words themselves. In wonder or in adversity, in joyous anticipation of journeys and adventures ahead and in times of uncertainty and trouble may God's gift of joy be to us a source of delight this Advent season.