

Covenant Life

- We will have a Community Gathering today at 4pm in the MSM gym. Details were sent in emails this week.
- As a reminder we have collected many wonderful Advent resources on our website [here](#).
- We are closing our 2021 Promise Drive, if you have not responded, please click [here](#) or mail it in or contact Sue Wagner.
- Please donate online [here](#) or mail your donations to P.O. Box 225008 Dallas, Tx 75222. Please note that donations must be in our possession by 12/31/20 to be counted as a 2020 donation, else they will count as a 2021 donation.

Reflection - Reading and reflecting on the readings today I was drawn to the second reading from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thes 5:16-24):
"Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil. May the God of peace make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it."

Part of the reason this passage stood out to me was that it started with the word Rejoice which many churches celebrate today as Gaudete Sunday. The other part was that Paul's admonitions to Rejoice, Pray, Give Thanks, Discern, and Refrain from evil were all mantras that Community has taught us our whole lives. These are foundational principles of living our covenant with God and one another.

But how easy is it today to Rejoice? If we are focused on externals it is hard. There is so much pain and suffering and hurt and loss in our lives and all around us. It is hard to find any aspect of our lives that has not been significantly impacted by the covid-19 virus.

The answer comes in understanding the difference between happiness (which does result from external factors) and Joy. We Rejoice because we have Joy. Why do we have Joy? Allow me to quote from Henri Nouwen in his book *The Heart of*

Henri Nouwen: "Joy is the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing - sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death - can take that love away."

"Joy is not the same as happiness. We can be unhappy about many things, but joy can still be there because it comes from the knowledge of God's love for us. We are inclined to think that when we are sad we cannot be glad, but in the life of a God-centered person, sorrow and joy can exist together. That isn't easy to understand, but when we think about some of our deepest life experiences, such as being present at the birth of a child or the death of a friend, great sorrow and great joy are often seen to be parts of the same experience. Often we discover the joy in the midst of the sorrow. I remember the most painful times of my life as times in which I became aware of a spiritual reality much larger than myself, a reality that allowed me to live the pain with hope. I dare even to say: 'My grief was a place where I found joy.' Still, nothing happens automatically in the spiritual life. Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day. It is a choice based on the knowledge that we belong to God and have found in God our refuge and our safety and that nothing, not even death, can take God away from us."

Sisters and Brothers, Advent is a time of Joy, Joy in waiting to celebrate the coming of our Lord and Joy in having chosen Jesus as our Lord and Savior and continually giving our whole lives to Him. We belong to Him and we belong to each other. We can take refuge in this fact. Nothing, global pandemics, loss of freedoms, jobs, health, money, relationships, even death, can separate us from the Joy of knowing God loves us unconditionally and is awaiting our return to Him.

The key point of this excerpt is that we must choose Joy and keep choosing it every day. We must choose to Rejoice and keep choosing it every day. These choices are based on the knowledge that we belong to God and have found in Him our refuge and our safety and that nothing, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

Let us pray together: "Jesus, I Rejoice in You. I Rejoice in Your coming. I choose to Rejoice in You today. I repent of the times I have not chosen to Rejoice in You and have focused on my own problems and challenges. Today I once again give my

whole life to You and following Your perfect will. I fix my eyes upon You with the firm conviction that nothing can separate You from me. I choose Joy, I choose to be joyous despite the trials of today. I belong to You and I Rejoice in my belonging to You. Thank You for my covenant sisters and brothers to accompany me on my journey home to You. Amen."

God bless,

David