

Message for December 17, 2017

Hope that Leads to Joy

Romans 12:9-12 Good News Translation (GNT)

⁹ Love must be completely sincere. Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good.

¹⁰ Love one another warmly as Christians, and be eager to show respect for one another. ¹¹ Work hard and do not be lazy. Serve the Lord with a heart full of devotion. ¹² Let your hope keep you joyful, be patient in your troubles, and pray at all times.

Joy is one of those missing ingredients of culture and it stems from hope, which is also waning.

We light the 3rd candle of Advent, “The Shepherd’s” Candle or also known as the Candle of Joy, to be reminded of the Joy that is ours in Jesus Christ.

In primitive lands Bible translators define the word for hilarious as, “The heart is laughing, and the eyes are dancing”.

That’s Joy, that’s being Joyful.

When God answered Hannah’s, prayer listen to how she responds:

1 Samuel 2:1 Good News Translation (GNT)

**“The LORD has filled my heart with joy;
how happy I am because of what he has done!**

I laugh at my enemies;

how joyful I am because God has helped me!

Her whole personality is involved in praising the Lord.

Our culture has moved to a dystopian attitude and much further.

We read dystopian novels. Dystopia is the complete opposite of Utopia, where things are pleasant and hopeful and good.

And now a new genre ...teen suicide.

Yet, despite the bleak settings of the dystopian stories, they did offer some sort of hope. They were harsh, painful, but with a glimmer of hope.

But new books on teen suicide, like “Thirteen Reasons Why,” offer absolutely no hope.

The reason this is important is because it is a reflection of culture.

It is where our youth and young adults are trying to make sense of life. And the Church has to step up and offer Hope.

The victim who kills themselves *is* dead forever. They can’t be saved or somehow rescued.

Its characters cannot imagine a better world and there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

The Bible always affirms the sanctity of human life and that life has meaning and there is purpose. And everyone has sacred worth because they are made in the image of God. Yet many feels there is no hope and live without Joy.

Suicide is now the second leading cause of death among adolescents and young adults.

The culture says that “they are valuable only insofar as they contribute to a productive society.” And millions of marketing messages daily sell them salvation in the form of stuff, not God.

How bad is America’s suicide problem? Well, it’s so bad that Americans’ overall life expectancy has declined for the first time since the 1930s.

As Aaron Kheriaty director of the Medical Ethics Program at Cal-State Irvine, writes the suicide crisis in America has reached epidemic proportions. Kheriaty says the problem can be summed up by the word Despair. Despair, as in the utter lack of hope. And without Hope there cannot be Joy.

Yet we have lit both these candles during Advent. Hope and Joy

How many of us have gone into a restaurant and witnessed at a nearby table, maybe a couple on a date, a husband and wife, a family of 4—mom, dad, sister, and brother—each one staring at their mobile devices. But you’ve seen it, and so have I.

This isolation breeds loneliness, and a lack of hope and no joy.

Research suggests that prayer, religious faith, participation in a religious community, and attitudes of gratitude, forgiveness, and other virtues reduces the hopelessness and that joyless existence.

The Psalmist writes:

Psalm 100:1-4 Good News Translation (GNT)

Sing to the LORD, all the world!

**²Worship the LORD with joy;
come before Him with happy songs!**

**³Acknowledge that the LORD is God.
He made us, and we belong to Him;
we are His people, we are His flock.**

**⁴Enter the Temple gates with thanksgiving;
go into its courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him and praise Him.**

And it's not just identifying as religious that matters—participation does!

In the end, faith in Christ provides HOPE, LOVE, JOY and PEACE.

Find someone to share that with this Christmas.

Remember who you are and to whom you belong.

AMEN