

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Third Sunday of Advent – December 13, 2015 – Joy
Pilgrimage to the Manger
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Luke 3:7-18

REFLECTION

**"They say a person needs just three things to be truly happy in this world:
someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for."**

— Tom Bodett, American Author (b.1955)

Enough

Joseph Heller, the author of Catch-22, once was at a party in the Hamptons. A guy came over to him and pointed at a young, 25-year-old standing in the party who worked for a big hedge fund. Heller's "friend" said to him, "See that guy over there? He made more money last year than you will ever make with all of your books combined."

Joseph Heller said, "Maybe so. But I have one thing that man will never have."

His friend was skeptical. "Oh yeah, what?"

Heller said, "Enough."

<http://www.jamesaltucher.com/2013/02/three-stories-about-billionaires/>

This is what I believe John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, was referring to: ENOUGH. If you have enough, then either settle down and be satisfied with it – or share it.

People **"Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."**

Tax collectors **"Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you."**

Soldiers **"Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."**

If you have enough, getting more doesn't necessarily make you happy. And it certainly doesn't make anybody around you happy – especially if you are taking what, by rights, is THEIR portion of ENOUGH.

When I have contemplated my own situation in life I've tried to figure out what makes me happy. Loving someone makes me happy – my husband and son being at the top

of the list. And I always come back to this: “Having enough to give some away” makes me happy. In addition – a lesson I’ve learned over time – “I ALWAYS have enough to give some away.” When I remember this – my heart warms – and I experience joy.

The other thing that gives me joy is when others (especially unlikely people) come to the same realization: they have enough to give some away.

The Zuckerbergs announced two births [last week]: a baby girl, and one of the world’s biggest philanthropies.

Mark Zuckerberg, the Facebook billionaire, and his wife, Priscilla Chan:

...have pledged to give away 99% of their Facebook shares in their lifetime, currently worth about \$45bn. The organization is structured not as a charity but as a limited-liability corporation (LLC) with broadly charitable aims... [and] has “the mission of advancing human potential and promoting equality...”

Zuckerberg announced the move on Facebook in the form of a letter to his baby:

Dear Max,

Your mother and I don’t yet have the words to describe the hope you give us for the future. Your new life is full of promise, and we hope you will be happy and healthy so you can explore it fully. You’ve already given us a reason to reflect on the world we hope you live in.

Like all parents, we want you to grow up in a world better than ours today.

While headlines often focus on what’s wrong, in many ways the world is getting better. Health is improving. Poverty is shrinking. Knowledge is growing. People are connecting. Technological progress in every field means your life should be dramatically better than ours today.

We will do our part to make this happen, not only because we love you, but also because we have a moral responsibility to all children in the next generation.

We believe all lives have equal value, and that includes the many more people who will live in future generations than live today. Our society has an obligation to invest now to improve the lives of all those coming into this world, not just those already here.

...Joel Fleishman, professor of law and public policy sciences at Duke University, said he believed the announcement would spur giving among the super-rich.

...Fleishman observed that the project had become particularly popular among the young and extraordinarily wealthy, who prefer “giving while living” to willing their assets away. “I celebrate his decision to do it as I celebrate Warren Buffet’s decision to give all that money to the Gates Foundation. People who’ve made all that money are by nature competitive; someone that young giving away that much money will undoubtedly stimulate others to do likewise.”

<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/dec/01/mark-zuckerberg-and-priscilla-chan-announce-new-baby-and-massive-charity-initiative>

These are the kinds of things that give me joy – and, I believe, cause joy in heaven. It’s why I have stayed in the church – despite many misgivings about the institution as a whole. I have found churches that have members who are serious about the joy of giving – especially giving in ways that make a difference in the world. And these are the people I like to hang out with. Many of these people are on fixed incomes. Many are scraping by or even homeless. I’ve mentioned before a woman who lived in her car and attended the last church I served. She was one of the most generous people I’ve ever met – a role model for me and others around her.

When I turned 50 I threw myself a scavenger hunt party. I sent people out in Pasadena (in groups of 2 or 3) to take pictures of places that were meaningful to me – schools and churches I’d attended, places I’d lived, architecture and places I’ve loved. And I asked each group of to do one random act of kindness – and then meet me back at the party to share their stories. It was the best birthday ever.

We each have to decide for ourselves if and when we have ENOUGH. And then we get to decide how much of our ENOUGH we can give away. But I am certain that in those moments when we do give “it” away – we will be filled with the joy of heaven and earth – and find ourselves dancing with G-d.

Luke 3:7-18

7 John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 9 Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

10 And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" 11 In reply he said to them, **"Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."**

12 Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" 13 He said to them, **"Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you."**

14 Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, **"Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."**

15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16 John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

18 So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT * JOY

Giving - A Sign of Joy

Author Unknown (in the style of Ann Weems)

I had a dream that the Holy Family
 came down the escalators at the Mall.
Angels in red raiment flew around
 sprinkling us with stardust
 singing alleluias and playing their bugles
And all the shoppers knelt in adoration and praise.
The Wisemen, working in gift wrap,
 began receiving our hearts
 and wrapped them in rainbow papers
 and we presented them to the Christ Child.

Then they were gone and we returned to our shopping.
But I heard no more complaining about the long lines
 and I saw no more rushing about.
We all smiled and greeted one another with
 PEACE and GOODWILL.
We all remembered that we had given away our hearts
 and JOY was all that remained.

On the way to the Manger let us remember that we are accompanied by Joy.

We light the candle of Joy as we travel through this season of Advent.

(Light two purple candles and the pink one.)

Why Climb Everest

George Mallory was the famed mountain climber who may have been the first person ever to reach the top of Mount Everest. In the early 1920's he led a number of attempts to scale the mountain, eventually being killed in the third attempt in 1924. His body was found in 1999, well preserved by the snow and ice, 27,000 feet up the mountain, just 2000 feet from the peak. Give up he did not. His body was found face down on a rocky slope, head toward the summit. His arms were extended high over his head. His toes were pointed into the mountain; his fingers dug into the loose rock, refusing to let go even as he drew his last breath. A short length of cotton rope – broken – was looped around his waist.

In 1992, when Mallory was asked why climb Everest this is the reply he gave:

“The first question which you will ask and which I must try to answer is this, ‘What is the use of climbing Mount Everest?’ and my answer must at once be, ‘It is no use’. There is not the slightest prospect of any gain whatsoever. Oh, we may learn a little about the behaviour of the human body at high altitudes, and possibly medical men may turn our observation to some account for the purposes of aviation. But otherwise nothing will come of it. We shall not bring back a single bit of gold or silver, not a gem, nor any coal or iron. We shall not find a single foot of earth that can be planted with crops to raise food. It’s no use. So, if you cannot understand that there is something in man which responds to the challenge of this mountain and goes out to meet it, that the struggle is the struggle of life itself upward and forever upward, then you won’t see why we go. **What we get from this adventure is just sheer joy. And joy is, after all, the end of life.** We do not live to eat and make money. We eat and make money to be able to enjoy life. That is what life means and what life is for.”

Source: Biographical information from Seattle Times January 16, 2000. Quote from: www.lackuster.com/quotes
<http://storiesforpreaching.com/category/sermonillustrations/joy/>