

Third Sunday of Advent 2020

'I can't get no satisfaction' yelled Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones in the 1965 rock classic! This song, among other things, was a rant against commercialisation, little wonder it has stood the test of time. Today, as then there is little satisfaction to be found in the promises of consumerism.

Joy, according to the dictionary is *a vivid emotion of pleasure arising from a state of well-being or 'satisfaction.'* Interesting, let's look at another definition.

...it is that of an 'unsatisfied' desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction. I call it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from happiness and pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again. So wrote CS Lewis in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*. An *unsatisfied* desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction.

Today is Gaudete Sunday, 'Gaudete' a Latin word best translated as 'rejoice.' In centuries past the antiphon for the mass would have taken from the letter of Paul to the Philippians, a letter with much to say about joy: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Joy then is a fundamental part of Christian living, sometimes misunderstood, often overlooked, but we find words associated with joy throughout the scriptures. Rejoice always says St Paul this time to the Thessalonians, the word that Paul uses keeps cropping up. For wordsmiths among you the bestowal of this joy 'Chara,' by God through grace 'Charis,' the gifts which then arise 'Charisma,' the resulting expression of gratitude Eucharistia and the act of then freely giving to others 'Charizoma' form the very basis of Christian living. Joy then is what it is all about. But Christian joy this Chara, like Christian love, agape, is not strictly something that you feel, it is not just an emotion. It is a way of being that drives what we do and say.

We can glimpse this joy in our everyday lives. But it is not about satisfaction, not in way that the dictionary understands joy. The bread and wine of the dinner table will bring us joy and we will feel satisfied, and it is good. Importantly Jesus takes that same bread and wine and placed on this table they become not the stuff of satisfaction, but of desire. This is that strange unsatisfied desire of CS Lewis which is greater than any satisfaction and this is where there is true joy. It is often said that the birth of the Church was Pentecost. But there is a good argument that says that the Church born at the Last Supper. Both Matthew and Mark recall that at the conclusion of the supper Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives. Out into the world to face down the worldly power of Herod and Pilate and the religious authorities. Joy is not a destination it is a movement...it is a protest movement!

If we follow the path of joy - 'Chara' through its many manifestations we arrive at 'Charizoma.' The freely giving of ourselves to God and to our neighbour, stepping out to face the world is the outworking of joy. This means that Christian joy has a political element that we don't normally associate with the worldly joy. Listen again to the Psalm 126.

When the Lord turned again the fortunes of Zion:
then were we like those restored to life.

**Then was our mouth filled with laughter:
and our tongue with singing.**

Then said they among the heathen:

'The Lord has done great things for them.'

**Truly the Lord has done great things for us:
and therefore we rejoiced.**

This Psalm like so many of the so called praise Psalms carries with it echoes of liberation, which is at the very heart of understanding Judaism and in turn Christianity. It is at the heart of the manifesto of Jesus in Luke's gospel as he reads the passage from Isaiah that we heard this morning:

he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim *liberty* to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;

Joy in this instance unlike its 'natural' counterpart is bound up with trust, self-giving and perseverance. We can see this in Paul particularly, these new communities like the Thessalonians, persecuted, marginalized and yet reaching out. Paul says it well in chapter six of the second letter to the Corinthians, he gives us a litany of dreadful things that have happened and concludes: sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

It is for a good reason that our rose candle nestles in the midst of the violet ones, in our Advent wreath. Gaudete joy shining out from the midst of our doubts and fears, our grieving and our sorrowing. It speaks to us about the worth in our waiting and wondering; the value, although often hidden, in our striving and our hoping, in our mission and ministry. This is what Advent joy is all about.

Joy is that for which we were made and this joy is embodied in the person of the John the Baptist who looms large in our imaginations today. And despite his leaping with joy in his Mother's womb, he is not the first person you think of when you think of joy. He probably looked a little like Mick Jagger - wild and scrawny, hardly joyful! His, was an unsatisfied desire, his waiting and questioning, his stepping aside for the one who is to come went seemingly without satisfaction. Perhaps his joy was to be found in the humility of decreasing while Jesus increased. His was a joy to be found in the trust that someone and something far greater than he was about to break into our world. I pray it may be the same for us in this Advent season. Amen.