

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

December 11, 2022

Old Testament Reading; Isaiah 35: 1-10

Responsive Reading; Psalm 146: 5-10

Epistle Reading; James 5: 7-10

Gospel Reading; Matthew 11: 2-11

Sermon Title: Rejoice for the Lord Hath Done Great Things

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; Silent Night, Holy Night. All is calm, all is bright.

Joy to the world. All you boys and girls. Joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea, and joy to you and me. Oops, Wrong Joy to the world. Wait a second. Maybe not. Isaiah; “The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice.” And Psalm; “Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; Who keeps truth forever.”

The third Sunday of Advent is Joy. Isn't this the epitome of joy, when all of God's creation rejoices together? Not only all of mankind but all the Earth, even the deserts and wastelands with budding plants that will be exuding songs of joy.

This is the ultimate of joy. Isaiah gets very specific in his description of what this joy will include. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing." Then I believe he goes into a metaphor of the Holy Spirit when he says, "For the waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool and the thirsty land springs of water." i.e. Through the Holy Spirit the river of life will transform mankind like actual water would transform a desert. Well, that's my take anyway.

In our Epistle, James is telling us that things that are truly worthwhile, are worth waiting for. He uses the example of the farmer that waits for the seed to germinate. He also points out that the farmer waits without grumbling about the delay and so we should not grumble with others while we wait. James says you can see the fruits of this patience by looking at how the prophets suffered with patience. All of this "stuff" is leading to a joy that is so great that we cannot even comprehend it.

The only way we can have this total joy is to believe that there is no way that this wonderful outcome can be prevented from coming into fruition.

As many of you might surmise, I am a Buffalo Bills fan. When I watch a game, I am on pins and needles because I do not know who is going to win and I have been disappointed in the past. I have the NFL network on my TV so sometimes a day or two after we win a game, I watch it again and guess what. When I know the ending, I am not devastated by an interception or penalty or a turn over or even the other team scoring on us. I know that we will win in the end so I don't worry about any mistakes that might happen. It even becomes uplifting when I see the team overcoming obstacles. As you know the Bills have never won a Super Bowl but we did win the greatest "comeback game" in the history of the NFL. When the Bills were down by over thirty points to the Houston Oilers and came back and won in overtime it was one for the record books. It was totally unbelievable. It was so unbelievable that thousands of fans had left the stadium and never got to see it happen.

In our gospel lesson John the Baptist is having a rough time. He is in prison and things don't look good. He sends two of his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?" The answer that is given by Jesus is almost word

for word what we heard in Isaiah. “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see. The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.” In other words, “John, you have every reason to be confident that God is going to win this game.”

We, as the Christian Church are something like a team. We are supposed to work together to accomplish the Great Commission, i.e. “Go into all the world, making disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

The Christian Church is like the Buffalo Bills in the sense that we are both teams made up of imperfect players but there is one huge difference. We as Christians have an infallible coach with an equally infallible game plan. We can't lose. Our coach is the one. We do not have to look for another. Oh, there will be penalties, there will be turn overs, there will be injuries and there will even be times when our opponent will score on us but in the end we will win. The great comeback has started. It started in a little town in a little stable with a little baby.

It was prophesied by Isaiah proclaimed by the Psalms, encouraged by James and affirmed by Jesus.

As it was said in the movie “The Ten Commandments” “So it is written. So, it shall be done!”

Because we know that this Christian Team, with this unbeatable coach with this perfect game plan, cannot lose, we have a Joy that not even the Devil can take from us. Hallelujah and Amen!