

Meditation – Joy Amidst Uncertainty - 5th January 2021

To state the obvious, Christmas 2020 was very different.

So many of us were not able to see our families, not able to exchange hugs with our grandchildren or to see their joyful faces as they gazed at the Christmas tree and opened their stockings and presents. Nor were we able to meet with friends and share a meal in our own homes. Travel restrictions and the opportunity to meet on Christmas Day often meant that those usual Christmas reunions and celebrations could not happen.

All these restrictions were necessary and it is obvious that more must be brought in, to try again to stem the advance and spread of the new strain of Coronavirus.

Like many, I have a child's love of the sparkle of tinsel and lights and the sharing of gifts. I am lucky that, for me, Christmas has always been a joyful time of year.

Thinking about this Christmas, I realised that it still retained the **JOY**. It did that for me because much of the accompaniments to the 'festival' were pared away and what remained was where it all started, the celebration of Christ's birth at Bethlehem.

So we **could** and **can** be joyful.

We **can** wholeheartedly sing the words of the carol -*Joy to the world!*

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare him room
And heav'n and nature sing*

We **can** Repeat the sounding joy and celebrate *The wonders of his love.*

Friedrich Schiller, in his 1785 poem, *Ode to Joy*, celebrates the joyous beauty of the world, the Creator and the dream of all people becoming brothers.

The rediscovery and appreciation of the natural world, the unity of purpose in developing resilience and survival strategies and the kindness of people, one to another, have characterised aspects of living through the pandemic.

I offer you two verses from the poem, *Ode to Joy*, used by Beethoven in his 9th *Symphony, the Choral*. The stirring singing of Beethoven's setting of Schiller's poem always raises a feeling in me of intense joy and hope.

*Heavenly one, thy sanctuary!
Thy magic binds again
What custom strictly divided;
All people become brothers,
Where thy gentle wing abides.*

*Be embraced, Millions!
This kiss to all the world!
Brothers, above the starry canopy
There must dwell a loving Father.
Are you collapsing, millions?
Do you sense the creator, world?
Seek him above the starry canopy!
Above stars must He dwell.*

Advent and Christmas draws on the writings in Isaiah; in chapter 12 we read -

*The Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.
With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation....
Sing to the Lord for he has done glorious things;
Let this be known to all the world
Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion,
For great is the Holy One of Israel among you.*

In Psalm 16 we read -

*You will show me the path that leads to life;
Your presence fills me with joy
And brings me pleasure for ever.*

We have to cling on, in this time of uncertainty, to the knowledge that our God has the way through for us all and will not desert us. We can feel secure in His care and the certainty of his plan for us and our world.

Paul writes in Romans 15, 13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The joy of the Gospel is, as Pope Francis reminds us in his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, (*The Joy of the Gospel*), that with Christ, **joy is constantly born anew** and that the joy of the Gospel is for all people, no one can be excluded.

Pope Francis reminds us that joy is often mentioned in Scripture.

John (the Baptist) leapt for joy in his mother's womb when Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth and when Jesus begins his ministry, John cries out '*For this reason, my joy has been fulfilled*'.

Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit.

His message brings us joy: *I have said these things to you, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*

In the Acts of the Apostles, Pope Francis tells us, that wherever the disciples went *there was great joy*'. Francis poses a question for us - *Why should we not enter into this great stream of joy?*

Bishop Alison White, contributing to a study day on *Evangelii Gaudium*, suggested that how we make a difference is to carry the treasure of the Joy of the Gospel and take it to others; that every person is worthy of our giving, that we should communicate our experience, our joy, our hope.

So in these uncertain times, when we have to acknowledge that we are not in control of events, we can know that God **is** predictable and that we can have confidence that he will walk with us. We can be joyful in his love and know that we are not alone.

We can go out with joy!

You shall go out with joy
And be led forth with peace,
And the mountains and the hills
Shall break forth before you.
There'll be shouts of joy
And the trees of the field
Shall clap, shall clap their hands...
and you'll go out with **JOY**.

May Christ's love reach into your life this New Year and the beauty of his amazing world bring you joy.

With peace to you all

Jenny

