

The New Joy

Scripture: Luke 15: 3-10
Date: December 13, 2020

JUNK

CULTURE - CONSUMERISM

During the Covid 19 isolation periods many have found new TV shows include the Disney Channel's new series Mandalorian. It reminds us of the many characters within the Star Wars movies. In Advent 2020 series we've been having some fun with the Star Wars movies – plot lines, quotes and characters.

But truthfully when I watched two of the movies – when I saw the Ewoks in Return of the Jedi and the Porgs in the The Last Jedi - what I saw was less characters for a movies and more of the potential merchandising for the Star Wars industry.

At Christmas there is a great effort into getting gifts for each other - yet often many things that go wrong. Often, we've bought something - only to have missing pieces, only to have broken pieces or to have all the pieces but no instructions. How many times have we bought a gift and then found that the kids like the box more than the gift!

We look to make Christmas joyous - especially for our loved ones - but the joy of Christmas is madness is lost in the madness of stuff. We look at the gifts we give and we look at the costs of how we live and we wonder what the value of Christmas really is. Is it just the latest merchandising ploy? Is it just an evening of carols and candles?

For some the value of Christmas – of our very lives – is diminished and lost with the madness of consumerism replacing the majesty and mystery of Christmas. We have lost the joy of being God's creation – God's children. We have lost our value. We have lost our way.

LOST

Jesus tells parables that also emphasize the point of value – to Him.

A woman loses a coin. Probably though - not just some loose change. Likely it would have been coins – probably 10 – that were attached to a head garment like a scarf. The coins represented a wedding gift and the wearer of the coins indicated the marriage that they were in.

As a result - the wearer of the coins had a wealth – not massive – maybe 10 days worth but it was still valuable as wealth and it was still valuable as status. To lose even one coin is to lose wealth. To lose even one coin is to lose honour

Another parable is about a shepherd who loses a sheep. Lost – not necessarily gone astray – because sheep will do that. Like the coins – the lost sheep has value – as often shepherds were hired hands responsible for the livestock and losing even one sheep would cost them.

Perhaps in 2020 – you don't have many coins on you and perhaps in 2020 there isn't anyone here who's lost a sheep. Yet who can say that they have never lost a set of keys or who can say that they have never lost their way. We do live in a disposable world where if you lose something – just get another. Yet often what we lose is ourselves

Many in our world today have lost their value - spending time becoming educated for work that no longer exists or saving money for a retirement fund that is no longer adequate. Their hopes, their dreams have failed. Their plans and their passions are destroyed.

No longer is there confidence in the purpose of life or the passion of life. On the outside it might look fine but - on the inside - there is no joy of living. On the outside it might look successful but - on the inside - it needs a Saviour.

JESUS

In our lives of lostness, in our lives of superficiality – we can strive to find and create joy on our own. But it is diluted and it is temporary. In the birth of a baby we find ourselves re-aquainted with joy found in the passion and purpose of loving and caring for this new life.

In the birth of Jesus Christ we find an even greater joy emerging as we return to our Creator. How much more in the birth of God within us does the joy of our salvation live as we rejoice in our returning to the presence of God.

A joy not found IN us but FOR us because of Jesus Himself. A joy He lived in His life, His death and His resurrection as described in Hebrews 12: 2

This glory of joy IN Christ Jesus that is FOR us – who believe -through the cross and resurrection It impacts us by restoring us to our glory – our fullness – our full joy as Jude 24-26 describes.

As such the joy within us becomes - unlike the broken and superficial world in which we live – permanent and it will endure and it will last. Life in and with Jesus fills us with His joy completing our lives – fulfilling our lives as John 15. 11 describes.

Joy from / with Jesus is not a joy that is not temporary or superficial or slight. It lingers because it's part of our deepest innermost being. Happiness is a superficial feeling that comes or goes but joy resides in the deepest parts of our being – giving us purpose, passion and power for our place of value in God's creation.

ADVENT JOY

In Advent we remember all of those truths of God's joy – that He is joy, that He gives joy and that joy is our strength. But also need to remember that the joy God gives to us – comes from God Himself. The texts today remind us of that. In the texts today the woman frantically looks for her coin. She puts on a light a light on – to see better, she sweeps the floor, she searches carefully ensuring that every effort is made to locate the lost coin. The shepherd leaves the other sheep 99 to find the one that was lost - risking losing another sheep - in order to locate the one that is lost.

But the story of Advent joy is also that there is a celebration. Upon finding the coin both the woman AND the shepherd celebrate. They are not ashamed of losing something in fact they are amazed at having found it. They call their friends and neighbours to celebrate and a party ensues – a wedding / a birthday / Christmas all rolled into one. All of heaven rejoices over one lost sinner coming home and that which was lost is now found.

There is a celebration – in the Kingdom of Heaven AND the Kingdom of Earth – when lost is found / when wrong is made right. When God and creation are reconciled – through Christ. When God and creation are restored – through Christ. When joy – true joy – of being with God’s family is returned to us – restoring us with God and remaining with us

The star wars merchandise industry – and it truly is that – is about making money more than making memories. They create a need that is independent even of the story. While there is something about playing with toys and making up your own stories – LEGO - there is also something about the original story that helps give identity – purpose – value to the items because the context makes sense.

In Advent we become reattached to our story so that we can become more and more familiar with where joy can be found and can become more and more familiar with where joy can be lived.

My wife and I have been married for almost 14 years and there remains much joy about that day – and each day since. But some of the greater joy of the day was marked with the celebration of family and friends. There’s a picture of my Uncle George smiling from ear to ear. For a many who fought in the Korean conflict and lost many of his friends – he never lost that infectious smile as the joy of his life continued to radiate from within. There’s another picture of my parents kissing in the reception. A picture that shows their passion in the kiss and one immediately after showing their joy for each other and for Rhonda and I.

We’ve been listening also to the stories of the members of our faith community as they tell of what joy means to them.

*Joy is celebrating the life we have each day
Finding happiness – from God – in all we are and in all we do.*

*Joy is enjoying life more than expected during the March / April months of 2020
Celebrate the good days – grab what you can
Accomplish what you can*

*Joy is inward as the external things of life disappear.
Joy is hard to find sometimes – but still present*

Joy is foundational to life and is cemented by traditions and rituals – especially at Christmas

CONCLUSION

Two weeks ago we looked at a new hope - in the midst of a dark and bleak world. Last week we looked at a new peace - a state of being at home with God – with ourselves – with each other. This week the new joy from God gives us the freedom to REJOICE.

For a coin that was found - for a sheep that was found – for a sinner that was redeemed and for a saint that was sustained.

That's us

That's Jesus

Merry Christmas