

December 19 & 20, 2020
“Drawn Up in Joy”
Rev. Liz Whitford

¹ *I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up,
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.*

² *O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.*

³ *O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol,
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.*

⁴ *Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.*

⁵ *For his anger is but for a moment;
his favor is for a lifetime.*

*Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.*

¹¹ *You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have taken off my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,*

¹² *so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.*

- Psalm 30:1-5, 11f

Do you have joy? Do you extol, praise, exalt, admire God right now?

“For [God has] drawn [us] up.” That is what our scripture reads today. Not only is one receiving an uplifting moment, but this idea of being drawn up is considered in Hebrew to be like water coming up from a well. As you look down a long brick cylinder into darkness, it seems to go down forever, and that’s where you have been. But a bucket is lowered to your unexpecting surprise. Then you are lifted, a lifting motion where there is no way of getting to those depths again. What tremendous joy must follow! What an overflowing abundance of relief! For God has drawn us up.

Many, if not all of us, have not found ourselves in a literal well. I would, however, assume that this scenario would not be forgotten. The joy of escaping the well would not be something that one would have to work deliberately on to have such exuberant joy! It would not be manufactured, not studied. It would be something that would come from the depth of the soul and would remain forever.

But, we tend to think of our joy as something that is fleeting. Are any of us really joyful all the time? Really? We may fake it ‘til we make it but do any of us really exhibit constant joy?! Our scripture illustrates to us what constant, all together joy can look like because of its look from past to present.

We see those two difference times. Where the writer once cried for help and sought deliverance, they now are exuberant with joy! Where death was once at the doorstep in Sheol (hell) and the pit (death), life has been renewed. Grace has been given and it has made all the difference. But, this isn’t just a narrative. It also comes with an invitation to learn from this experience, to see

how God has shown up with grace and affection. The writer challenges us to react then as devoted to God, praising him, doing good, seeking peace. Finding that altogether joy.

In the chapter of altogether joy that our All-Church Study “Almost Christmas” provides, author Matt Rawle writes something inspiring I’d like to share with you.

“An altogether joy recognizes that joy can be, maybe most appropriately, experienced in the midst of pain. Joy is not a moment that negates our pain or dismisses it as inconsequential or meaningless. Joy is a steadfast assurance that God is with us always, even if pain is with us too. In a way, joy is a ‘homesickness for a home you were not aware of having.’”

As Matt shared of pain, we too can connect with that aspect. Many of us have experienced some sort of pain in this season of life, whether physical, emotional, or other. Yet as we experience these things, God is with us. There may be times when we feel the emptiness as if God is not there, yet scripture tells us that God never leaves us. This may be hard for us to accept in those times, yet we may find even years later that assurance that God was with us through it all.

And then there’s this idea from Matt of homesickness. What kind of reaction to you come to when you think of joy as a “homesickness for a home you were not aware of having?” It seems to be a new outlook on what joy is. Think about it for a moment. When we feel joy, we are uplifted, our soul seems to float (if you will). It makes us feel different than we did the moment before. So, if this joy is a homesickness, what can that look like? Does it look like a yearning to continue feeling the way we do in that joy? Does it look like excitement for what’s to come? Does it look like something completely different? Joy as homesickness...hmmm.

We also see an idea of experiencing silence as altogether joy. Throughout our lives, we have experienced times of silence. Sometimes this silence can be deafening. Sometimes this silence can be awkward. Sometimes this silence can be peaceful. Sometimes this silence can be rejuvenating. Sometimes, yes, sometimes, this silence can be exactly what we need to experience joy, the gift that cannot be achieved.

So where do we go from here? We have these ideas and images of altogether joy: coming up from a water well, coming up from the depths of hell, joy from pain, homesickness, and silence. Some of these ideas may be hard for us to live into. Joy is hard to find sometimes. Joy can sometimes be hard to even understand, to grasp. Yet, even if there is one image that we can hold onto for this altogether joy where we live into the joy of God all the time, than we have taken a huge step in our faith.

So, how can we live in altogether joy, where we live in the assurance of God’s love and grace constantly? Honestly, it is one step at a time. Many of us will not encounter a water out of a well situation, and that is ok. Our God gives us the grace and love to continue to grow in our faith, to continue to work towards altogether joy. So, not only may we find joy in the season of God’s grace through Jesus’ birth. May we also find a way to see God’s grace in all things so that we may find altogether joy (joy of God’s sustaining grace).