

“You Aren’t What You Have”
Psalm 126
John 1:6-8, 19-28

This is The Third Sunday of Advent and we light the Joy Candle. Last week, The Second Sunday of Advent, the Peace Candle was lit. Two weeks ago, The First Sunday of Advent, the Hope Candle was lit. Today, the Joy Candle represents the experience in life we have because of the hope and peace that Jesus brings into the world, then and now.

The story of Advent gathers you into God’s family, defines you as a family member and enlightens you. Believing the life, light and truth offered in Jesus is critical for living as one who is beloved of God.

In the 19th century Charles Bradlaugh, a prominent atheist, challenged a Christian man to debate the validity of the claims of Christianity. The Christian was Hugh Price Hughes, an active soul-winner who worked among the poor in the slums of London. Hughes told Bradlaugh he would agree to the debate on one condition. Hughes said, “I propose to you that we each bring some concrete evidences of the validity of our beliefs in the form of men and women who have been redeemed from the lives of sin and shame by the influence of our teaching. I will bring 100 such men and women, and I challenge you to do the same.” Hughes then said that if Bradlaugh couldn’t bring 100, then he could bring 20. He finally whittled the number down to one. All Bradlaugh had to do was to find one person whose life was improved by atheism, and Hughes—who would bring 100 people improved by Christ—would agree to debate him. Bradlaugh withdrew!¹

In this regard, Bobby Schuller, the pastor of Shepherd’s Grove Presbyterian Church in Irvine wrote *Creed of the Beloved*: “I’m not what I do. *I’m not what I have*. I’m not what people say about me. I am the beloved of God. It’s who I am. No one can take it from me. I don’t have to worry. I don’t have to hurry. I can trust my friend Jesus and share his love

¹Submitted by Jeff Allen to preachingtoday.com. The citation is found in D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?* (Thomas Nelson, 1997), 189.

with the world.”² You are beloved by God. You aren’t what you have. Herein lies the reality of joy.

Psalm 126 and John 1:6-8, 19-28 announce that agony and ecstasy belong together.

Psalm 126 proclaims that hurt cannot be separated from hope, pain cannot be separated from peace and weeping cannot be separated from joy. Psalm 126:5 reads, “May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.”

John 1:6-8, 19-28 reminds us that our relationship with Jesus must continue to grow. There is nothing static in our relationship with God. The dynamic of growth always juxtaposes life with death, light with darkness, and truth with falsehood. All things were created in and through Jesus. With that said, Jesus is life confronting the areas of death in our lives. Jesus is light exposing the darkness in our lives. Jesus is truth convicting us of the falsehoods in our lives. John 1:1, 3, 6-7 read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God...All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being...There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.”³

All things continue to be created in and through Jesus. And Jesus does so through the words and deeds of those who love him. Jesus’ message of hope, peace and joy opposes the church’s captivity to the consumerist agenda that favors happy thought, feel good themes of God and life as a believer. The non-believer, however, is like a judge,

²Bobby Schuller, *You Are Beloved* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Books, 2018), 16.

³In the three paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of J. Clinton McCann Jr., F. Scott Spencer and Andrew Foster Connors in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 39-41, 46-48, 48-50.

weighing credible testimony of the witnesses to the hope, peace and joy they find in Jesus. The joy Jesus promises is the outgrowth of the acted upon promises of hope and peace which transforms the hurt, pain and weeping of real life.

On this Third Sunday of Advent, we lit the Hope, Peace and Joy Candles on the Advent wreath, lifting up the Joy Candle. You aren't what you have. You are who has you. You are a child of God. God has claimed you as God's own. You are beloved. Jesus gathers you into the family, defines you as a family member and enlightens you. Again, Bobby Schuller writes, "You are God's treasure. You are not what you have. Much of life is a journey of letting go. Jobs will come and go. Money will come and go. Opportunity missed or seized will come and go. But in the end you belong to him [God]. In the end that will be all that matters."⁴ Gratitude for being God's beloved assists you in navigating the hurt, pain and weeping of life. Joy is the outcome of acting upon Jesus' promises of hope and peace. Seize your belovedness. Act with hope, peace and joy. Love others. Show others their belovedness. Be grateful for the intersecting and transforming power of hurt and hope, pain and peace and weeping and joy. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 13 December 2020,
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at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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⁴Bobby Schuller, *You Are Beloved*, 80.