

**Isaiah 2:1-5** (CEB)

This is what Isaiah, Amoz’s son, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

- 2 In the days to come  
the mountain of the Lord’s house  
will be the highest of the mountains.  
It will be lifted above the hills;  
peoples will stream to it.
- 3 Many nations will go and say,  
“Come, let’s go up to the Lord’s mountain,  
to the house of Jacob’s God  
so that he may teach us his ways  
and we may walk in God’s paths.”

Instruction will come from Zion;  
the Lord’s word from Jerusalem.

- 4 God will judge between the nations,  
and settle disputes of mighty nations.  
Then they will beat their swords into iron plows  
and their spears into pruning tools.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation;  
they will no longer learn how to make war.

- 5 Come, house of Jacob,  
let’s walk by the Lord’s light.

**Romans 13:11-15** (*The Message*)

But make sure that you don’t get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can’t afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don’t loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!

**Psalms 98** (paraphrase by Nan C. Merrill)

O sing to the Beloved a new song, for Love has done marvelous things!  
By the strength of your Indwelling Presence, we, too, are called to do great things;  
We are set free through Love’s forgiveness and truth.  
Yes, your steadfast Love and faithfulness are ever-present gifts in our lives.  
All the ends of the earth have seen the glory of Love’s Eternal Flame.

## **“Prepare Him Room: Hopeful Joy”**

Nobel Peace Prize Laureates His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu have survived more than 50 years of exile in the soul-crushing violence of oppression. Despite their hardships -- or, as they would say, because of them -- they are two of the most joyful and hope-filled people on the planet.

In April of 2015, Archbishop Desmond Tutu traveled to the Dalai Lama's home in India to celebrate the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday, and to create what they hoped would be a gift for others. They looked back on their long lives to answer a single burning question: “How do we find joy in the face of life's inevitable suffering?”

Douglas Abrams, who recorded many of their conversations for The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World, tells us that these two spiritual icons traded intimate stories, teased each other continually, and shared their spiritual practices. By the end of a week filled with laughter and punctuated with tears, these two global heroes had stared into the abyss and despair of our times and revealed how to live a life brimming with joy. In the midst of this book they identify the “Nature of True Joy,” the “Obstacles to Joy,” and the “Eight Pillars of Joy.” The first of those Pillars is PERSPECTIVE. The others are *humility, humor, acceptance, forgiveness, gratitude, compassion, and generosity*. These are the positive qualities that allow us to experience more joy in life, in every circumstance of life.

Developing a perspective of JOY involves cultivating the ability to reframe any situation positively. Our capacity to experience gratitude and our choice to be kind and generous shape our mental and spiritual immunity to pain and suffering. Similar to the changes described by the prophet Isaiah, Bishop Tutu contends that *“a healthy perspective really is the foundation of joy and happiness, because the way we see the world is the way we experience the world. Changing the way we see the world in turn changes the way we feel and the way we act, which changes the world itself.”*

The Dalai Lama responded, *“For every event in life, there are many different angles. When you look at the same event from a wider perspective, your sense of worry and anxiety reduces, and you have greater joy.”* He goes on to remind us that seeing more of the whole allows us to see more options for interaction with life's most challenging events and circumstances. He notes that we often react to difficult situations with fear and anger. The stress can make it hard for us to step back and see other perspectives and other solutions. We are invited to see the blessing in the curse, the joy in the sorrow, and to find hope by beating swords into iron plows and spears into pruning hooks. Finding a new perspective helps us to reframe current tragedy into future hope.

Edith Eva Eger (a holocaust survivor) tells the story of visiting two soldiers on the same day at William Beaumont Army Medical Center at Fort Bliss. Both were paraplegics who had lost the use of their legs in combat. They had the same diagnosis and the same prognosis. The first veteran, Tom, was lying on his bed knotted into a fetal position, railing against life and decrying his fate. The second, Chuck, was out of bed in his wheelchair, explaining that he felt as if he had been given a second chance in life. As he was wheeled through the garden, he had realized that he was closer to the flowers and could look right into his children's eyes. “Perspective” made all the difference.

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Archbishop Tutu calls this, “taking a God’s-eye perspective” to allow us to transcend a limited view of isolated identity and self-interest, into a focus on the greater good, and the God-intended blessing of any situation. This new perspective allows us to confront any “problem” with creativity and compassion rather than with rigidity and reactivity.

In our brief, but extremely rich passage from Romans, Paul tells us that as Christians, we are all “morning people.” The time is just before dawn, the sky is brightening, the alarm is ringing, the day is at hand. It is time to rouse our minds from slumber, to be alert to what God is doing in the world (taking a God’s-eye perspective), and to live in accordance with God’s coming salvation.

This “wake up call” comes in the midst of teaching about mutual love and acceptance in the fellowship of faith. Paul interrupts himself to remind his hearers of their common HOPE in the clear and revealing light of God’s coming day of salvation. This HOPE is the motivator for the new ways of relating to one another, including the Jewish and Gentile Roman Christians. In the midst of today’s bitter divisions eroding nations, communities, and churches, Paul’s words bring needed PERSPECTIVE. In the wonderfully countercultural season of Advent, Paul reminds us that our hope is in Christ to bring light to the darkness, to mend our divisions, to inspire us to work together for the common goal of bringing salvation to all. This is the good news!

Speaking of good news, let me tell you about a friend who discovered the news of God’s JOY in Christ. When my friend was in elementary school, his mother, a music teacher, insisted that he take piano lessons so that he would have a source of cultural blessing for himself and to offer to others. My friend hated taking lessons. For hours he was forced to learn scales, and technique, theory and history. One day, as he was rebelling against performing his scales for his teacher, and was trying to watch the neighborhood kids playing just outside the window, his teacher (who happened to be his grandmother) asked him once again to play a scale in D major. .... “Now if you can play it another way, you will hear the good news,” she told him with eager anticipation. “What good news?” he asked. And he played the scale starting with the high notes. Now play that scale with pauses after the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 6th, 7th and last notes.

Irritated and frustrated, he stood up, announced that he was quitting, and went out to play with the other kids. Years later, his grandmother passed away, and my friend grieved deeply. He always felt that by quitting the piano lessons, he had let her down. He had never discovered what good news she was referring to. He was living with deep regret. Then, when cleaning out her home, he sat down again at the piano...the same one they had used for his lessons. He remembered her encouragement to play the scale with pauses after the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 6th, 7th, and last notes in order to hear the good news. And so he tried it. .... “Joy to the World, the Lord is come!” That new perspective lifted him from the despair of grief to the JOY of HOPE. It all now made sense. A “God’s-eye perspective” had been found.

How are we going to capture a “God’s-eye perspective” of HOPE and JOY in our lives during this Advent season? God is sending us a “wake up call” in life and faith. Seize the opportunity to change your life, our congregation, and our community with the power of HOPEFUL JOY!

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**DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING**

And so, my friends, may you be blessed with a Hopeful Joy  
That rings deep in your soul so that whatever life brings,  
You will have prepared room in your heart  
For the birth of new ways of looking at the world,  
Being in the world, bringing hope to the world.

And may you sing along with all heaven and nature: