

Third Sunday in Advent
Year A

Isaiah 35:1-10
Psalm 146:4-9
James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11

Gaudete Sunday – Joy. That is what this Sunday is frequently called. We light a pink candle and use pink (or rose) vestments to celebrate this joyous day. Looking at the reading from Isaiah, we can understand where this idea originates. From the very first line to the end of the reading, we hear the wonderful changes that God will bring to the earth in the last days. Everything is grand and glorious. In his letter to the dispersed Israelites, James tells us to be patient. He uses the metaphor of the farmer who has to wait on the rain – that which he cannot control. In like manner, we must wait for the coming of the end time.

By the time we get to the Gospel reading, we start to see a change in the wording. No longer are we looking forward to a glorious time of celebration or waiting patiently with the farmer. John the Baptist is sitting in prison wondering if he got it all wrong. It was not that long ago when he was sure that Jesus was the Messiah, the One promised by God. Now, he wants to know for sure. So, he sends some of his disciples to get confirmation from Jesus. The response Jesus gives echoes what the prophet Isaiah has foretold. But, is that what John needs to hear?

If we put ourselves in John's shoes, we might say something like this – that's great for those who have been healed of their afflictions and infirmities, but I am still sitting in prison waiting for Herod to decide what to do to me. How am I helped?

We don't know if John thought this way or not, but there are many in this world today who are not looking at their condition with joy. Each week we pray for Vadim and the people of Ukraine. Is this a joyous season for them? How about those in Gaza? What about the elderly person who is lonesome, wondering who these children are who say, "Hi, Grandma or Grandpa", not recognizing them? We might think about those who are laid up in hospitals, not being able to be with family and friends during this season. Is this a joyous time for them?

I think there is a bit of God in the planning of the calendar when we follow Gaudete Sunday with Blue Christmas two days later. The more I reflect on this juxtaposition of events, I find comfort in the fact that we can recognize that not everyone views this time of year in the same mood as our culture projects. This is not a happy time for everyone, and we, as the church, need to honor that fact.

Throughout this holiday season, I ask each of us to consider how we might reach out to those who are alone – physically, mentally, or emotionally – and support them in this time. Whether it is a phone call, dropping by for a visit, or bringing them to church Tuesday, let us do our part to help everyone feel the love of God in this season when God poured out love to us in Bethlehem.