**“The Wells of Salvation”** by S. Finlan, at The First Church, December 12, 2021

**Isaiah 12:2–6**

2Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.

3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. 4And you will say on that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted.

5 Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. 6 Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

**Luke 3:12–18**

12Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked John, “Teacher, what should we do?” 13He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” 14Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

18 So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

This is the Sunday of Joy in the Advent schedule. I have joy that we gather together to give thanks. I have joy that we look after each other. I have joy that we are open to receive others, including new people, into our church and into our our hearts.

We also have joy that the Messiah has come, and we know who he is. John, of course, was the precursor, the trailblazer, for Jesus the Messiah. Some of John’s followers became Jesus’ initial disciples, namely Andrew and Peter (John 1:37, 40–41), and possibly James and John as well (Luke 5:10).

Here we see John’s moral message: be honest, don’t extort money from people, don’t grumble about your wages, don’t give false testimony. Along with this stern morality goes a brave humility. He considers himself unworthy to even tie the sandal of the Messiah, when he comes. He has a clear insight into the special kind of baptism the Messiah will bring, a baptism of fire and Spirit, but then finishes with a remark that comes more out of his own theology than out of the teachings that the Messiah is going to present, talking of gathering people like wheat, and burning the sinners like chaff. Yet Luke says John is spreading the gospel. Right after this, though, John gets arrested by Herod.

This passage tells us that John spread the good news. Part of that good news is the anticipation of baptism in the Holy Spirit. People will be baptized in the Spirit and in fire, which probably means in power and enthusiasm. The Spirit-baptized people will be fired up. And they were, if you recall the story of the preaching that occurred on Pentecost. This fire brings confidence and a desire to share the good news with others. The fire is surprising and vivid.

Now let’s look at the good news that is found in the Old Testament passage. We are promised “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isa 12:3). And it is directed to all humanity. It is to be “ma[d]e known . . . among the nations” (12:4), and is to be proclaimed “in all the earth” (12:5). So the announcement of salvation was meant for everyone, Gentiles as well as Jews. I wonder if First Isaiah was proclaiming this message to some Gentiles, or was he just training his fellow Jews to be *ready* to be open to any Gentiles who came to them to learn about God? We don’t know. In either case, he was spreading the good news about God’s openness to people from all nations.

The gospel is an invitation, a message of openness and welcome. If truly heard, it awakens joy in the heart, for who could not be pleased with an open invitation from God? We are moved to say, with the psalmist, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth” (Ps 98:4). We are moved to offer mercy to others, since so much mercy has been shown to us. In the same way, we are moved to share our joy with others, since we have been graciously gifted. Our cup overflows, and we let it. This is not a matter of knowledge or study, but of experience and feeling, especially of spiritual feelings, which indicates an experience of spiritual values like beauty, truth, goodness, love, and unity.

God has shown me mercy in my career as a minister. I am grateful for the people of this church, who have taken me into their hearts, and made me feel at home here. It may just be your natural mercy that you extend to me, not something you had to think about long and hard. It gives me great joy to prepare a message about God for you each week. I hope it feeds your souls.

Doing something worthwhile leads to joy. Dinesh Paliwal is a successful businessman who used his earnings to fund an academic chair at Miami University and a scholarship program. He says it is a privilege to be able to give back. Winston Churchill said “we make a living by what we get. We make a *life* by what we give.” Martin Luther King said “everyone can be great, because everyone can serve” (<https://www.trvst.world/giving-philanthropy/giving-back-quotes/>).

Maybe the wells of salvation are not only the blessings we get from God, but the kindness that we can show to others. Serving others brings us joy. Let’s focus on inward joy for a while.

I’d like to lead a guided meditation now. If you’ll join me, I’ll guide you in a brief meditation. See that your feet are planted on the ground and that you’re sitting comfortably. Now close your eyes and think of the word “Joy.” Joy! It’s a word that needs an exclamation mark. Now think of what brings you joy. What *does* bring you joy? A grandchild? Your pet? The sunrise? The thought of a hug you received from someone? Perhaps the thought of Jesus teaching by the seaside? Or his warming your heart with his presence in your life? Linger on those thoughts for a moment; feel the hug, feel the smiles, linger with the warmth they bring to your heart. Hold the feeling close to your heart. Now utter a sigh of gratitude to Jesus. Imagine Jesus *receiving* that sigh with joy. Imagine Jesus’ joy to be part of your life. Hold that thought for a moment: Jesus enjoying *you*. And now let’s come out of our meditation.

Did you feel some warmth, some joy?

It is here, in the inner life, that we get the fire that inspires us. So go forth in joy, carrying the image of drawing water from the wells of salvation. Think of God’s open invitation. Think of beauty, truth, goodness, and mercy. And when joy wells up within you, think of how you can share it with others. Thanks be to God.