

Isaiah 12:2-6

I'm preaching from Isaiah 12 today, the reading we heard in place of the Psalm this morning. Since we actually sang only the odd verses of the scripture passage, as the cantor sang the even verses, I'm going to read the lesson from Isaiah, including verse 1 which was not part of our reading.

And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on God's name;
make known the deeds of the Lord among the nations; proclaim that this
name is exalted.

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

3 With joy you will draw water
from the wells of salvation.

4 And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on God's name;
make known the deeds of the Lord among the nations; proclaim that this
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.

This brings me memories of Tenth Street United Methodist Church, the first church I attended regularly as an adult, and as is obvious by the name, one that wasn't Lutheran. We always sang a response to the Psalm at intervals, and I have no idea which Psalm it was, but a somewhat paraphrased version of verse 1 and 2 was my favorite response... "Surely the Lord is with me, I will trust in him and not be afraid. For the Lord is my strength and my might and he shall be my salvation." What wonderful words to hear on this Sunday where we celebrate joy... my strength, my might, and my salvation comes from the Lord.

Which brings us to the question, what is joy? Is it being eternally happy? We know it isn't. I would best describe it as drawing strength from an inward sense of trust and contentment. Many people find it difficult to trust. They've been betrayed and let down by others so many times, or maybe only once by someone who was very important to them, that they aren't going to let their guard down and get hurt again. The story of Mark Madis is one that none of us hopefully will have to endure, but it truly happened to a 7 year old boy. Mark was very outgoing, a leader among the children at school. One day he was playing in a construction site with friends when somehow one of them accidentally knocked a cement barrier onto him. It weighed about a ton and a half, and it should have killed him, however the layout of the construction site caused him to only be paralyzed from the waist down.

That sounds great, unless you're a young child whose mindset was that of a strong, independent leader among his peers. The pain and helpless feelings were so strong he learned to depend on his mother instead of trying to work on improving himself. He slipped behind, not only physically, but emotionally and mentally. When he was able to return to school in a wheelchair, he realized how physically different he was from who he used to be and from everyone else, how far behind he had slid with his schoolwork, and how much his social skills had deteriorated, that he became so alienated he

stopped trying to be friends and ignored everyone. He had built emotional walls around himself so that he would not feel further pain than what he was already experiencing. As he aged his relationships with his brother and mother deteriorated and he couldn't be with either of them without a fight breaking out. He just wanted to be like the other boys.

Now I'd like to tell you that Mark's troubles ended by finding Jesus, but unfortunately that wasn't the case. He did find healing and dropped the walls he had constructed by finding an inner light within himself. He forgave himself, and his ego began to shrink which allowed him to have a better outlook on life and to try different methods of improving his lot in life to where he eventually is able to walk with crutches and is no longer filled with anger and despair (Madis Mark. *The Story of my Life: How Pain Became a Shining Light*. <https://madismark.com/story-life-pain-became-shining-light/> captured 12/14/24). Even though he didn't say so, I'd like to believe his inner light was the Holy Spirit speaking to him, but that's me, the pastor imposing my beliefs on his story.

I do believe however that the Holy Spirit can stir up feelings within us that allow us to break down the walls we build around as protection for ourselves. And it is through these experiences that we learn to feel joy. Yes, life may not be what we wanted or expected it to be but there have been times when we were truly joyful, even if they were fleeting moments. Remembering and drawing on those joyful moments is what might get us through the difficult times.

I'd like to rewrite Mark Madis's story so that he finds his strength in Jesus. I know that when I injured my back, I trusted that Jesus had performed many miracles and he could heal me. It was my life's mission to let people know that Jesus truly heals. It took many years and another accident to heal my back, however, there are times when physical healing doesn't take place. That is when we draw upon the strength that comes from knowing Jesus cares that we hurt. We pray for physical strength to deal with the pain and emotional strength to deal with not physically improving. Then we can find comfort when we lean into Christ, knowing he has suffered as we are suffering.

As we grow in strength, finding our might from the Holy Spirit, we begin to become more confident. And as we become more confident, we try harder. Perhaps we don't ever recover completely, but we are in a better place than we were when we began. And it is because of God, working through the Holy Spirit that we have been able to improve. When we begin to understand that God is the source of our strength and our might, we can rejoice knowing that our very breath and life comes from God. That God has promised never to desert us. That no matter what we go through, God is right there experiencing it with us, sharing the pain.

It's not an easy task to bring down the walls that we have built around ourselves, but it is worth it to know the joy that comes from the Lord. And we cannot forget that another joy from the Lord is our salvation.

Our salvation comes only from our faith. We don't have to do anything more than believe that Jesus is God's son who came to this earth and took the sin of the world upon himself, opening our pathway to eternity with God. Jesus left paradise to be born in a humble manger, growing up as a human child. He lived life caring for all people, even those who did not accept him as the Messiah. When the time came that those in power had the opportunity to rid themselves of the nuisance he caused, they took it, giving him the death of a criminal even though he had done nothing more than to

challenge their systems as he tried to teach the means of bringing God's dominion to earth. And because of this he knows physical pain, he knows the pain of rejection, and he knows the pain of unanswered prayer. Even though he was rejected many times by those he came to save, he never built up emotional walls to protect himself. He took everything to God in prayer and continued to love humanity.

What an amazing person, fully human, fully God. He is a great example of how to live but he is more than an example. He is the means of our strength, our might, and our salvation, and ultimately, our joy.

All glory be to God.