

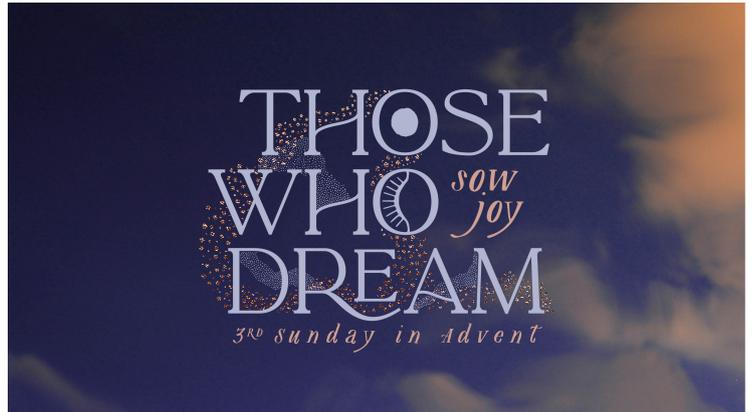
Those Who Dream... sow joy (Joy)

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle. This week, it would be appropriate to find a purple cloth or scarf to decorate the table. Start by lighting the Christ candle. The candle helps to centre us. Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.

A video of the readings and reflection for this service can be found here:

<https://vimeo.com/490621355/22848c2951>



Welcome and introduction

Welcome!

Today we celebrate joy!

And we acknowledge that sometimes joy can be hard to find.

So whether you are full of joy

whether you are grieving quietly

whether you are not sure how you feel today

You are welcome here and I pray we will encounter God's love and grace together. And that somehow, in some way, God's joy will break into our lives and hearts.

Light candle

We light a candle to remind us of God's presence with us always, and to draw us once more to the Christ, the Light of the World, whose light shines into even the darkest places of the world and cannot be overcome.

Acknowledgement of Country

We recognise the stewardship of the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation for the land on which we gather today. Our indigenous brothers and sisters have cared for this place since time immemorial and pay our respects to them and their elders, past, present and emerging. We commit ourselves to the continuing work of seeking justice and reconciliation in this land.

Call to Worship

Once upon a time, there was a little girl who had a terrible day.

She left her lunch at home.

She skinned her knee on the playground, and no one wanted to sit with her on the bus. As she sank into her mother's arms at the end of the day, her mother said,

"Honey, what was the best part of today?"

The little girl cried and said, “Nothing! The entire day was terrible.”

So the mother got down on one knee, wiped away her tears and said, “There is always some good. Sometimes we just really have to look for it.”

The little girl looked up at her mom and said, “What is good about today?”

And the mother said, “For starters, you’re here in my arms.”

Friends, anytime we gather together to worship God, we are held in God’s arms. So may we recognise that gift, and in doing so, may we sow joy.

Let us worship God.

Creator God,

Scripture is flooded with dream-like images:

the lion lying down with the lamb, justice rolling like a mighty river, swords being beaten into plowshares, the prisoner being set free,

good news to the oppressed,

the whole world rejoicing.

To our human ears, there are times when these words can sound

like nothing more than a far-off dream—

downplaying prophecy to fantasy.

However, what we know is that to dream is to hope,

and to hope is to imagine,

and to imagine is to wonder,

and to wonder is to believe,

and to believe is to live and breathe for your promised day.

So give us the strength to listen as we dream, O God.

For deep down, we know your words are the very thing we need. Amen.

Sanctified Art

Sing: Gather Us In (TIS 474)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ar0BXa82F9M>

Reading: Psalm 126

¹ When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;

then it was said among the nations,
‘The Lord has done great things for them.’

³ The Lord has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

⁴ Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.

⁵ May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

⁶ Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.

Hear what God’s Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God!

Lighting the Advent Candles

We relight the candles of hope and peace.

Light the candles from last 2 weeks.

A: I dream of dance parties in the kitchen.

B: I dream of laughter that is contagious.

A: I dream of birthday candles and another beautiful year.

B: I dream of family game nights and dinner parties with friends.

A: I dream of homemade Book Week costumes and homemade family recipes.

B: I dream of pillow forts, fireflies, and front porch swings.

A: I dream of every little thing that brings joy; and I know it comes from God.

B: So today we light the candle of joy as a reminder

that God's dream for this world involves the end of all tears.

A: God's dream for this world involves a joy that overflows and is contagious.

Light candle.

B: So may this fire burn bright, and as it does, may we sing.

A: May we dance.

B: May we laugh.

A: May we hold onto the people we love.

B: May we sow joy in a hurting world, and may it be an act of holy resistance. Amen.

Sanctified Art

Prayer

O Great Writer,

With a sky full of stars and a world full of flowers, there should be no end to our joy.

And yet, instead of decorating our very being with joy, we let it slip away like loose change.

Instead of singing like Mary, or dancing like David,

we pass by remarkable beauty and love most days, unfazed.

Forgive us.

Teach us the ways of children, who laugh and dance and sing

as if joy is the very thing that keeps them alive.

Maybe they have joy figured out. Gratefully we pray, Amen.

Sanctified Art

Listening for God's Voice

Let's hear from the scriptures. You may notice that I have not been putting the words of the text up on the screen. I want to encourage you to listen to the words and, even better, to bring your bible or device and follow along...

Reading: John 1:6-8, 19-28

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

¹⁹ This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' ²¹And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' ²²Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' ²³He said,

'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
"Make straight the way of the Lord" ',
as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, 'Why then are you baptising if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' ²⁶John answered them, 'I baptise with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptising.

Hear what God's Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God!

Video - Moderator's message

<https://vimeo.com/485752056>

Reflection - Those who dream, sow joy...

God, your coming into the world is not a single moment in time, but a never-ending cascade of moments in which we may participate in the joy of your creation. Grant us eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to know the true meaning of rejoicing in you. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Advent 3, 13 December 2020

Today is one of those days in the church calendar that I often struggle with. Out of the four weeks of Advent, hope, peace and love are all just fine with me, but this joy thing sometimes seems beyond me - especially at this time of the year when these couple of weeks are often the busiest of the year - all the preparation has to be done in these couple of weeks and most of the special events are held in these couple of weeks. Throw in a couple of pastoral "emergencies" and I am often stretched to my limit and not feeling all that "joy-filled".

And I know that for many people, this time of year is just plain hard. The world around us puts expectations upon us that are beyond most of us - large family gatherings, mountains of food on the table, gifts for everyone (of mostly stuff we don't need). For those of us who have broken families, families in far-off places, tight budgets or health restrictions, who struggle at the best of times with relationships, this time of the year is nothing but a constant struggle.

I also know that for some of you, joy comes easily and naturally. If that is you, I praise God for you, because you encourage me and you are often amazing at lifting the spirits of people around you.

So let's think some more about joy?

There are lots of passages in the Scriptures that express joy for what God has done or will do, and that encourage us to do the same.

The Psalm that we began with today, Psalm 126, speaks of God turning our weeping into joy - we go out weeping carrying the seed, and come home with shouts of joy carrying an abundant harvest.

Two of the extra readings for this week - which you will encounter in your Advent Devotions (Isaiah 61 and Mary's song in Luke 1 which we will look at more deeply next week) point to God bringing good news to the poor, letting captives go free, binding up the broken-hearted, showing mercy, lifting the lowly and bringing down the mighty, filling the hungry and sending the rich away empty.

Now has anyone noticed that there *is* good news there for many, but there is also not-so-good-news for some?

The rich and the mighty don't come off so well, do they? It is unlikely that in the fulfilment of this dream, they will be rejoicing.

So what might we do with all this?

We can readily identify with God binding broken hearts. Many of us have been there and have experienced God's healing embrace in those times. When our hearts are broken, we know God's embrace, and, slowly, we know the healing of God's love and grace.

But what about the poor and the oppressed? There are few here today who could claim that space.

At the same time, many of us would probably say we are not rich, nor powerful... but...

But we are - rich and powerful.

Very few of us have to worry about where our next meal is coming from. Most of us could cope if the car needs fixing or the fridge gives out with not much more than a mere inconvenience.

Many of us know how to read and write, we are well-able to express an opinion, and we enjoy a freedom in this country that many around the world can only dream of.

And that puts me in the place of the rich who will go hungry and the powerful who will be brought down - and it is not so comfortable.

And I don't want us to wriggle out of that discomfort.

So what if we think about it this way:

I know that I am at my most joyful when I am fully occupied doing something that I know will bring about a closer reflection of God's kingdom - when the things I am doing, the people I am with, the people I am serving get a clearer glimpse of the love and grace of God. That may mean I need to be generous with my time and my money, or to speak out for justice, or simply sit alongside someone who needs comfort or to be heard.

I also know that I am least joyful when I feel like I am pushing a barrow up hill for no particular purpose - when I find myself doing stuff simply for the sake of it, or because it has always been done that way and we haven't thought about why for a while. Or when the world around me seems completely disconnected from God's dream for the world.

Then, joy is found when I commit again to being part of a world that more closely reflects God's dream. When I reconnect with God's dream in prayer and study and in doing what I can to make the dream reality.

In John's gospel, John the Baptist enters the story, not as someone living rough on the edges of society, and not with the firebrand preaching we heard last week in Mark's gospel, but as a *witness*. His life and preaching, in John's gospel, points towards Jesus. Like John the Baptist, we are not Jesus, but we are called to be witnesses to Jesus and to the reign of God he came to embody.

As we gather around this table this morning, we embody part of God's dream - a dream where all God's people would be united, remembering God's commitment to us and our commitment to God. Each time we gather here, we re-enact God's dream for the world, and we commit to being witnesses to Jesus, and to embodying God's dream for the world in our own lives.

And as we embody God's dream, we change the world, we bring joy and we experience joy. May it be so.

Video / Listen: Those Who Dream

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHIDSdYfBmM>

Responding

Prayer for others - Based on Isaiah 61

God of comfort and promise,

we pray for the brokenness of the world.

For the hungry and the hurting, the disappointed and the angry,

we pray for your healing and restoration.

And we call to mind people we know and love, in particular, who are struggling today... *silence*

Help us be involved in creating communities that actively care for the broken.

We pray for those who mourn and live with grief.

And we call to mind, people we know and love who are grieving lost loved ones, lost jobs, lost opportunities... *silence*

May we be a presence and solace.

We lift to you those discouragements we have experienced this week.

Discouragements in our families, our friendships, our jobs, even discouragement in ourselves.

We lift to you, O God, the different things that drag us down.

Restore our faith in you, O God.

Restore our faith in ourselves and each other.

We have different hurts, worries, fears.

We name them in our hearts and ask for help to trust you with them.

Bring us comfort; plant the good news deep within our hearts.

Help us to see your restoration of the world when we welcome a shy or unsure young child, when we listen to the dotting story and share the joy of a grandparent.

Help us to see your promise of healing in the crusty exterior of someone genuinely trying to be kind.

As we grow in faith, we pray for the ability to rejoice always and to pray continually.

We trust that the one who calls is faithful. Now and always. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Advent 3, 13 December 2020

Holy Communion

If you would like to share in Communion and are unable to join us in-person, please let Rev Kath or Rhonda Back know. We would love to bring Communion to you in your home at a time that suits you or we can arrange a smaller group to share together.

Offering

In responding to what we have read and how we have heard God speak to us, we commit ourselves to moving with God's Spirit, breathing life in the world around us.

Let's pray...

The prayers we offer,

the gifts we give,

are like seeds sown in trust

that God's love will water these seeds and bring new life, hope, and joy to those who weep.

Hope be within you. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Advent 3, 13 December 2020

Notices:

- if you would like to be on our email list, please email the church office at kiamaunitingchurch@outlook.com
- Advent - devotional studies - some copies still available
- Christmas tree - take a gift tag, buy a present, return it to the Kiama church by 17 December - *Thursday*
- Uniting World - gift cards are still available from Julia S or online
- Christmas Bowl - envelopes are available - you can return them directly, give online, or put your envelope in the offering plate
- Christmas Services - who will you invite to share this special time?
This week: **Quiet Christmas** on Friday evening at Jamberoo - bring a chair or a blanket and join us on the lawns for an evening of beautiful music and readings
Messy Christmas on Sunday afternoon - if you have grandchildren, this is a great opportunity to bring them along to share in some craft and for them to hear the story of Christmas. It will help us if you can give us some idea if you are coming. This is the first thing we have done like this in a little while so we really have no idea how many to prepare for, but if you can let us know that will help. And if you are available to help out on the day with craft supervision or general crowd control, please let me know.

Sending out

Sing - Advent News (Seasons 3-5)

Blessing

As you go,

May you have the strength to dream wild dreams of justice, peace, and joy that overflows.

May you have the humanity to listen to the dreams of others.

May you have the confidence to trust that the God who heard the cries of the Israelites in Egypt, hears your dreams as well.

And may you have the conviction to return to this space, for our best dreams are those we dream together.

In the name of God who dreamed us into being;

Jesus the one who lived God's dream;

and the Holy Spirit who continues to inspire our dreams.

Go in peace, go in love. Amen

drawn from Sarah Are