

# *Order of Worship*

Third Sunday of Advent, December 13, 2020

WELCOME

PRELUDE                      *Veni Emmanuel*                      P. Yon

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH                      Psalm 126

HYMN 246                      *Joy to the World*                      ANTIOCH

CAROL                      *Away in a Manger*                      arr. Doug Smith

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

HYMN 229                      *Infant Holy, Infant Lowly*                      W ZLOBIE LEZY

SCRIPTURE                      Isaiah 61:1-4,7-11

MESSAGE                      Pastor Rebecca Voss

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN 224      *Good Christian Friends, Rejoice*      IN DULCI JUBILO

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE      *Trumpet Tune on STUTTGART*                      P. Cattaneo

## Prayer Corner

We lift up Jen Marzu's sister-in-law, Jona, who is in her final stage of this life. We pray that she experiences a comforting transition into the arms of Jesus. We also lift up her husband Kenny (Jen's brother) and their children and their extended family and friends as they grieve.

Grant them the peace, comfort, and hope of your Spirit. Amen.

The home I grew up in was literally free. It was a 12-room farmhouse built in the late 1800's only 10 miles from our state capital building. My parents purchased 50 acres of land, and the old house that sat on it was thrown in for free in the contract. When my mom was a young girl she would walk across the fields to this farm and play their pump organ. When she grew up and got married, the senior siblings who had lived there more than 90 years gave my parents that pump organ as a wedding gift, and my parents bought their neglected farm. The primitive plumbing and electrical systems were so bad that my mom had to pump and carry water from the well to cook, clean, bathe, and even wash our diapers. But that pump organ still works!

Over many years, my dad used his remarkable handyman skills to completely rebuild the relatively ancient home into a space of stability and safety. My mom used her design and landscaping skills to bring a fresh sense of historic preservation inside the house and throughout the several acres of lawn, flower beds, vegetable gardens, orchard, and outbuildings. It was technically a free home, but they invested a lot to give our family a sense that we were home free. My parents were living out Isaiah 61:4: *"They'll rebuild the old ruins, raise a new city out of the wreckage. They'll start over on the ruined cities, take the rubble left behind and make it new."*

There is something freeing about being home. It is a place where we change into comfy clothes, put up our feet, let the chores slide a day or more, and only think about how we look if we have to leave our home. That delightful dynamic has gotten complicated for many of us during this pandemic. We often feel anything but free when our homes start to seem like a prison that we are stuck inside as we work and/or school from home and take prudent precautions. We all need good news to set us free from however our lives have felt trapped, been troubled, or turned inside out.

Imagine 5 or 10 years ago. Many of us sat in business or missional meetings with presentations promoting a version of "Vision 2020". Leaders shared dreams and goals for the progress that would be made and fulfilled by the year 2020. After all, 20/20 is considered the standard of good vision. I suspect that many of us started this year wishing and wondering if it would be the fulfillment of our hopes or dreams. Sadly, it's ended up being worse than most nightmares.

Ironically, 2020 is the year I lost my 20/20 vision. It started with a retinal tear and laser surgery in January. A month later my retina detached and I needed more serious surgery followed by two weeks at home laying on my left side at a 45-degree angle. After my long recovery I was back to church for one Sunday, March 15, which would be the last day most of us have been able to worship together in person. My surgery healed, but I started having diagonal double vision. I remember being in an online training class for MCCI (Missional Church Consultative Initiative) and being instructed to drive around our church neighborhood over our lunch break to see our mission field through fresh eyes of faith. I drove a familiar route near the delightful congregation I pastored in De Pere just before moving to Wausau. I grew both frustrated and fearful as my double vision got worse. I realized I was probably as dangerous as a drunk driver. My defiant prayer cried, “How am I supposed to see the mission field when I can’t stay here where I’m happy? I can’t envision a mission in Wausau, and I can’t even see to drive safely! This move is bad timing, and this dumb double vision makes it nearly impossible to drive, read, and write. How are you going to fix this, God?!”

After letting me vent, God calmly spoke the words of Isaiah 61:7 in a still, small voice: *“Because you got a double dose of trouble and more than your share of contempt, your inheritance in the land will be doubled, and your joy go on forever.”* Some of you may need to hear these words sink into your souls as a reminder that God knows and cares about every loss, fear, frustration, burden, and trouble you are going through. I don’t believe God caused any of it but am sure that God is ready to redeem all of it. When Jesus was baptized and went through long and troubling temptations in the wilderness, he came to his home town, Nazareth, and went to the synagogue. He opened the scroll to Isaiah 61:1-4 and proclaimed his mission:

*“He sent me to preach good news to the poor, heal the heartbroken, announce freedom to all captives, pardon all prisoners. GOD sent me to announce the year of his grace—a celebration of God’s destruction of our enemies—and to comfort all who mourn, to care for the needs of all who mourn in Zion, give them bouquets of roses instead of ashes. Messages of joy instead of news of doom, a praising heart instead of a languid spirit. Rename them ‘Oaks of Righteousness’ planted by GOD to display his glory.”*

In Biblical times most people who were in prison were there because of their debts. Even now, so many people are feeling imprisoned by poverty, heartbreak, and grief this year. Perhaps your spirit has been languishing, your debts have been deepening, and your well-being is not so well. I believe God not only has “messages of joy” for you, but also through you. This joy is not dependent on happy circumstances, but on the inner assurance of faith. We’re reminded in James 1:2-4, *“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

Joy and freedom are primarily spiritual states of our souls. We can be home free, even if we think or feel like we’re stuck. We can be filled with joy, even if our earthly conditions aren’t making us happy. Isaiah 61:10 says, *“I will sing for joy in God, explode in praise from deep in my soul!”* This often comes before we can experience the earthly freedom and happiness. Mine came when I was prescribed prismatic glasses that seem to miraculously re-align my diagonal double vision. I can also clearly see why God called me to move to Wausau, and I’m very happy and blessed by this church.

Another example is wearing our masks when we are around people outside our households. I am sure we are very eager to no longer need to do so, but people have been wearing other kinds of masks long before this pandemic hit. Tough words that mask a wounded heart. Designer clothes, cars, and accessories that mask an insecure identity. Addictions that mask shame. Those kinds of masks have left behind debt and destruction in so many ways. Perhaps God’s priority is to remove those masks and set us free.

Kirsten Hornby is a mother and high school orchestra director in our church. On top of the challenges that COVID brought all of us, she also lost her 10-year-old daughter to brain cancer this fall. She posted a picture of a truth that she both wears and lives: *“Can’t mask my JOY!”*. *The joy of the Lord is your strength!* (Nehemiah 8:10). Will you freely come home to a life rebuilt with joy? Will you take off the hidden masks that harm while you wear the practical masks that help one another? Let’s look and clearly see and live out God’s vision of freedom and joy, even in 2020. Then we will be home free. Amen.