

Pray More Advent Retreat 2018 - Transcript

Rejoice in the Lord

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Welcome back. Welcome back to our third session of this Advent retreat. My name is brother Casey Cole, and a happy Gaudete Sunday to you. Rejoice and be glad. We begin, as we always do, with prayer.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Good and gracious God, You tell us today to rejoice. We rejoice because You love us, because You've created us, because You redeem us. We rejoice because we know that Christmas is just around the corner. That the celebration of Your Son's incarnation, the reminder of the second coming is right around the corner. We rejoice because You have infused us and all with Your Spirit, and we know that redemption is at hand. We pray that we may always be thankful, and that thankfulness may be shared to all we meet. In Your name we pray. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When I was a kid, I played a lot of sports, and one of the things I played in middle school was football. Now, I wasn't the most physical guy, I didn't like to tackle people all that much, but I was really fast. So I played free safety, I was a slot receiver. And I was fortunate enough, when I was 12, 13, middle school age, to be on a really good team. We were 9 and 0 at one point, and we went to the championship game. We were a really good team, and throughout the whole season I think our defense had given up 2 touchdowns in 9 games. So we felt really good about ourselves. But we were going up against another really good team, another team that was 9 and 0. And this was the first game of the year where we didn't know if we were going to necessarily win.

It was a cold, bitter night, late October, early November, and we were really excited. We wanted to be champions. And one point in the game, about halfway through, right before halftime, the other team had the ball, and we were playing defense, and there was a guy I was supposed to cover and I didn't see him. And I went the wrong way, and they threw a touchdown, and we were losing. And I knew it was my fault. The coach did not have to yell at me, my teammates didn't have to yell at me. I knew it was my fault, and I felt completely filled with shame, disappointed. I had let everyone down, and everyone felt disappointed by me. This was not a good moment of the game.

But luckily, my coach trusted me, the players backed me, and I wasn't benched, I wasn't thrown off the team or yelled at. And we fought hard the rest of the game,

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and we started inching back in, and at one point we were winning. We were winning with just a few minutes left, but the other team was driving, and we were in the same situation: Close to the goal line, they might score and win. Until the quarterback went back to throw the ball, and one of our players hit his arm and it fluttered the wrong direction, and my eyes got really big.

Because this is at free safety, it was coming sort of my direction, and there was no one else around. And I ran and ran as hard as I could, and I lunged for it and caught it just 6 inches above the ground. Interception. And I started running the other way. And I got tackled by the other team, but I tell you, my team and my coach tackled me so much harder. They were rejoicing because, with that catch, we had won the game. We were going to run out the clock and be champions, 10 and 0. We were the best team in the league. And there, in that moment, my shame, my disappointment, letting everyone down was completely wiped away. It was nothing but excitement. Nothing but rejoicing. All of that was gone. We were champions.

How powerful of a moment that was for me, for our whole team, to see where we were, fallen, and now to see where we are now, champions. And I think, in some kind of trivial way, this is what our relationship with God is like. We can look at God's relationship with us through salvation history, how God sets us up to be in a good position, He encourages us to do well, and we could do well. But in fact, many times throughout history we have fallen very, very short. We can read the Old Testament and see how people were unfaithful, how they worshiped false idols, how they stole and oppressed people, and broke the law. And we can see how God, just like my coach, was very disappointed. We can see how the fellow people of Israel, like my teammates, felt let down, betrayed, disappointed.

So many times, we as a people have not lived up to what we could have done. But just like my coach, God does not just throw us out. God's wrath doesn't just come down immediately. Despite the anger that He shows sometimes in the Old Testament, we also see a tremendous amount of patience and love. Time and time again people would fall, and time and time again God would give them another chance. He loved them and was patient with them, knowing that if He just gave enough time, that they could do it. That they could be faithful. That their moment of jubilation, their moment of great joy would eventually come. And that moment does come.

We celebrate that moment today, remembering Jesus' incarnation. We remember the resurrection, that those moments have come for us and we are champions. Despite our checkered past, despite the fact that we've fallen and been sinful, Jesus redeems us. There is nothing we can do to give that up. There is nothing we can do to undo what He has done for us. We've made it. God has done that for us. And so

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we rejoice. But it leaves us with an interesting question: How do we respond to this great joy? How do we respond to the fact that God loves us unconditionally, supports us, and is patient, has trust in us? Do we simply go back the way we came, unchanged? Do we continue to sin? Do we continue to fall short, thinking that it won't matter? I think that our gospel offers us a great explanation of what we do when our Lord rejoices in us.

We see the figure of John the Baptist come on the scene, and we see him preaching a powerful message, converting people's hearts. People are excited, they have great expectation, it says, for what is to come. And so they go to him and they say "What shall we do? How do we respond to this great joy that you're announcing?" And he tells them what they are to do. He says "To the one who has 2 cloaks, give one to the poor. You don't need 2, but that poor person does." He says to the tax collectors "Take only what is prescribed. Don't take more. Don't oppress people. Don't do what you have been doing, what is acceptable in society. You're called to do more. You're called to justice. And to the people who are in the army, to the centurion, what is he to do? Well, he's to stop extorting people. Stop using his power for evil. And, in fact, be a protector of society.

In all of these examples, what we find in Saint John the Baptist is that once we've been loved, once we've had that conversion, once we realize that God rejoices in us, well, we can't go back to the way that things were. We can't go back to the way that we were. Something has to change. For us, when God rejoices in us and we feel that rejoicing, we need to rejoice in the world. We need to rejoice in the fact that God gives us so much, so we give more to others. The way that we accept this love is to live with love and justice. To realize that Jesus has given everything to us, so that we can give everything away as well.

When we look at our world, we see that there are many opportunities, both for rejoicing and for a change of heart. And we have to ask ourselves the great question: What would Jesus do? Given all of this love, when we look at our families, when we look at our jobs, when we look at our world, our church, how would Jesus respond to some of these trials? Would He go back the way people came, or would He challenge people to think differently? To change the system, to change our behavior, to change the way we act? I think if we truly love Jesus, and we truly want to be like Jesus, it means that we need to change the way that we treat others.

Jesus tells us in the gospels that He is with the poor. That when we feed the hungry, when we give drink, when we clothe the naked, when we visit the prisoner, we're not just do-gooders, we're not just reaching those who need something, we're actually doing that to Him. And it reminds us that Jesus Christ is

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all around us. That, while Jesus came 2,000 years ago in flesh form and as a human being, that His Spirit is here with us. And it makes me wonder: Do we recognize the wonderful presence that is in and through everything? When we see the homeless person on the street, do we think “Ugh.”? Are we grossed out? Are we annoyed? Do we try to run by without even recognizing them? Or does something inside of us say “That’s my brother Jesus there lying on the ground.” Is our heart changed? Is our heart moved to share the love we’ve been given with others? Have we been changed to act differently now?

Now, there’s no one easy path to what that looks like, there’s no one message that we need to give the world, no one answer. But as those who have been loved, those who rejoice in the Lord, we need to share that rejoicing with those around us, and we need to share that love with those who are around us. And sometimes that means changing what we do, changing how we act, and really living as if we believe that Jesus was among us, and that His kingdom was coming to fruition. And so on this Sunday of rejoicing, we rejoice that Christ is with us already, and that the more we love, the more that we act like Him, the more that He is made present in the world. And that is a reason for the whole world to rejoice. And so we conclude with our prayer.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus Christ, You have given us everything. You have left all the luxuries of the world behind, You left Your comforts behind, and You gave up Your life. We pray that we may never become dull with this message. That this message may never become commonplace or boring, but that every time we hear it, every time we see Your face, we may rejoice with great gladness. What an extraordinary gift You have given us. This is not a gift that we could simply hold on to ourselves, but a gift that we must share. We pray that we may have the inspiration, but most of all the courage to share that love with all we meet. In Your name we pray. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.