

3rd Sunday of Advent

A number of years ago I wrote an Advent story called Harold the Herald. You will hear it if you are able to come to Christmas Revelations next weekend. It's about a young boy named Harold who never speaks above a whisper and everyone in his family, his father Herb, his mother Hortense, his brother Hal, his sister Hillary and even his grandmother Hilda who is hard of hearing (and incidentally played by parishioner Marjorie Ihrig) are constantly saying to him "Harold we can hardly hear you!" Well, the story is about Harold "finding his voice" with the help of Hark the Herald Angel who teaches Harold that each person has something important to say. That each person has Good news and "IS" Good News. The young boy who plays Harold in the production is Tommy 10 years old and, a student at Winston Prep, the former Xavier Parish School. His mom told me that before he went to Winston, he couldn't read but in a year at Winston his reading has improved by "leaps and bounds". Working with this young boy with the help of parishioner, all around theater guy, Larry Ruth, has filled me with such Joy. Hearing him find his voice on stage, projecting to the back of the theater. Wow! The scriptures say "then the tongue of the mute will sing." I'd add to that "Then will Tommy find his voice!"

The voices that we hear today speak with different tones! Isaiah speaks *encouragingly* of the joy that accompanies the return from exile when God is restoring God's people to their rightful place.

James speaks *carefully* and tells the community to be patient, waiting for the lord as the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth
John the Baptist, speaking from prison speaks *anxiously* as he voices the question “Are you the one who is to come or should we look for another”
And Jesus speaks “loud and clear”
“Go and tell John what you hear and see:
the blind regain their sight,
the lame walk,
lepers are cleansed,
the deaf hear,
the dead are raised,
and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.
And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”

I think we all know how important it is to “have your voice heard” especially when you have “something to say”. We all know that our church only allows the “chosen few” to have a voice in the liturgical assembly. As a result there are so many, many voices that are not heard. I am particularly grateful here at Xavier for the voices of “it was the women who stayed”. Lizzie Degear’s reflection on the Annunciation for the feast of the Immaculate conception is brilliant and pastoral. That’s why you’ll find it on the website under Pastor’s messages and homilies. It’s where it belongs. And then there is Kathleen Friel’s reflection on Joy. She uses the pixar film “Inside out” to speak about Joy, one of the emotions that Riley a pre-teen experiences.

“On Joy Sunday, my heart sits with Joy. Joy is the annoyingly optimistic friend who loves early mornings

and raw vegetables, takes delight in every challenge, and perpetually sees the best in everything. Joy embraces Riley's first day at a new school, while Disgust laments over wardrobe choices, and Fear is convinced that the first day will bring nothing but catastrophe. Joy is beautiful, funny, and wise. Joy loves life and embraces every aspect of her world. At the same time, Joy alone is a bit naive, selfish, and delusional.

And then there's Sadness. I love Sadness, the character. She moves slowly. She assumes everything will turn out terribly. She wears a turtleneck. She "obsesses over the weight of life's problems." Sadness brings reality to Joy and the other emotions. Sadness gets under Joy's skin. “

Kathleen asks the important question How can Joy permeate when real people experience abuse and trauma, and are not heard or helped? How can Joy permeate when people are being shamed and even killed because of their political views, their religion, their sexual orientation, their gender, or their health? I would add to that.

How can we be joyful when the new leadership of our country is appointing mostly men who have vested interests in wealth, power and success at the expense of the poor, the marginalized, the voiceless?

How can we be joyful when the leadership of our Church is so “hard of hearing” that it refuses to listen to stories of LGBT Catholics, many of whom are ordained priests who have ministered in the Church

faithfully, tirelessly and whose lives are “Full of Grace”. How can we be joyful when church leadership continues to “judge” and label and depersonalize real people?

How can we be joyful when all around the world religious belief does not “connect” people as religion in its essence is meant to do but rather makes enemies. Another bombing of a Coptic church in Cairo!

I could go on with a litany of Lament on this Joy Sunday. But as Kathleen wisely says
For me, it helps to look beyond the present. Joy is always there. Other emotions - fear, anger, disgust, sadness, despair, loneliness, and grief - help point us to Joy.

Life is a gift, but with this precious gift comes Fear, Sadness, Anger, Disgust, Anxiety... and Joy, Love, Hope, Peace, and Solidarity. Jesus shows us that Joy and Love win, no matter how rough the journey.

I think Isaiah, James, John the Baptist and certainly Jesus would agree with what Kathleen has to say. To conclude, I'd like to invite Larry Ruth, parishioner and my “god-send” to say just a few words about Christmas Revelations.