

# Joy

St Columba: Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> December 08

Susan Adams

**Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11**

**John 1:6-8.19-28**

This week I was driving through a suburban township in the outskirts of San Francisco. You will be aware that I have been away. As part of the Christmas preparations the town had decked itself out with banners and bows, bells and tinsel and lights.

The banners read, noel, and peace and joy against backgrounds of bells and stars and doves. When I said to Keith that I would think about ‘joy’ on the plane home he replied... “Joy is being in San Francisco!”... maybe ...but what is that all about? It set me thinking.

All the key words that we reflect on during Advent are words that express feelings/emotions: hope, peace, joy and still to come, love. They are difficult words to explain and most of us think we know about them from experience based in our interpersonal relationships. Hope and peace Keith has already reflected on...but what about joy? It is not a word we use very often; it is a Christmas-time sort of word.

Is it happiness? Yes...but...it is more than that...

In our Christian vocabulary, joy is more than a ‘wake up in the morning and feel good about the world’ sort of feeling.

Joy is a feeling deeply connected with the peace and hope themes that

have already been commented on...but somehow 'joy' plants its feet stubbornly in the mire and proclaims that despite all that is wrong with the world, all that is wrong with our lives, all that is out of sorts for me, life and the goodness of living can be proclaimed; new beginnings are possible, all that dehumanises and depresses will be overcome. Joy, expressed in our body language as individuals and our body language as church, is a faith statement! It is a feeling of confidence that the healing and wellbeing that we desire can be realised in our living. As with most feeling and emotion words it is the contra feeling - trouble and despair for example - that helps us know what 'joy' is.

In San Francisco shops are closing, there are heaps of sales, nightly on television we heard reports of families who had lost jobs and then their homes...stories of newspapers closing down...and we saw empty airport lounges along with other significant signs of the financial recession biting at the heels of the vulnerable and the middle class...But still the banners went up: peace, hope, and joy.

As I reflected on the contrast between what we saw and experienced in the lives of the people we were visiting and their community it seemed the only way to respond to these decorations was to see them as statements of faith. Somehow, at this time of year, Advent, in a world that was examining itself, and wondering what on earth was happening - defiant body language proclaiming joy is necessary more than ever. We need to declare boldly that we believe a new beginning is in sight, that there is way to live together in mutual respect and care. Living this

faith statement enables us to - in the words of the Christmas angels – rejoice: live joy!

Even though today's Gospel is not very specific about what the characteristics of the one who is coming are, there is no doubt that something new is about to happen and John is waiting expectantly. It is a reading that is looking forward with hope and confidence to something new when the Messiah, the anointed one does come. Isaiah on the other hand is quite clear what he is expecting, and what is required of him as an anointed prophet. He invites us to rejoice because we are beloved of God and in earth there will be fruitfulness and harmony as we learn to care for and respect each other. It is another active waiting reading full of promise and joy.

So let me invite you into a promise, a promise that all will be well, and invite you to live defiantly rejoicing in that promise. Let your imagination and your body language joyfully proclaim your faith...hang out the banners, tie the ribbons sing the carols and rejoice with the angels in the promise of life in all its fullness.