

**I'm Not Tired!**  
**Sermon 205 | Greystone Baptist Church | December 3, 2023**  
**Luke 1:1-23**

There's a joke in our household that started years ago, when Mia was just a tiny little thing. It must have been in the toddler years when she started to pick up on the fact that our evening conversations would eventually broach the subject of bedtime - whether it was time or not.

As parents do, we would notice behavior and moods, we observed the ways the circles beneath her eyes grew heavier as that witching hour approached, and we would try to find ways to discuss and get on the same page about making that nightly move toward bedtime - without upsetting the sleepy toddler.

As most children eventually do, she began to pick up on our pattern and eventually broke into the formerly adult conversation to assert her own opinion on the matter: *I'm not tired!* She would say. Though she wholeheartedly believed this to be true, we knew another truth. Hers were tired eyes.

I believe we have video evidence on one of our phones of Mia's eyes growing heavy and being almost closed when one of us said, "Look at those tired eyes." These words jarred her back awake, providing the necessary energy to open the eyes as wide as possible, as she quickly asserted, "I'm not tired!" The video went viral in the family group texts and now anytime someone starts to act grouchy or starts to nod off before the appropriate time, someone will say, "Are those tired eyes?" And the person in question responds (holding their eyelids open as wide as possible) "I'm not tired!"

It is a joke in our household but as is often the case, beneath the humor lies a kernel of profound truth.

To admit that we are tired, that we need rest, that it's time to wrap up the work and excitement of the day *is to succumb to our mortality*. To admit that we need rest is to acknowledge our humanity, our weakness, and our

vulnerability. But could it also be that to acknowledge our weariness is the first step toward discovering joy?

As we read the Gospel selection for this morning we quickly realize that the world into which the *good news* is born is a weary and saturated world. We can relate to how Luke's audience must have felt. Overwhelmed with news, stories about this Jesus figure. Who he was, what he did and said, what it all meant? Luke's words read just like the news we consume day after day...

*Since many have already written an orderly account,  
I too decided to report the story,  
after investigating everything carefully from the beginning.*

In other words, yeah, you've read the other reports, you've got the gist of it, but *here* are the real facts. No need to look any further, I've already done the homework for you. This news is not fake news, it is real news, true news, well-documented news... *good news*.

And because these lines are so familiar in our overly-saturated-with-news culture, we might also understand the level of fatigue that this assertion elicits from the population.

*Can we really trust it?  
How do we know this news is different?  
Do we even have capacity to hear it anymore... or should we just shut  
it out altogether?*

Luke's version of the news begins with a priest and his wife. Their names are Zechariah and Elizabeth and as far as Luke is concerned, they are good people, righteous people, blameless in the eyes of the law. It also cannot go unmentioned that they are priestly people, both of them. Not by choice, as a modern reader might assume, but by DNA. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth come from priestly tribes. Elizabeth's was the most impressive, being from the line of Aaron, the brother of Moses. So it definitely makes sense that these two are described as righteous, blameless, holy.

What doesn't make sense... What is a bit more surprising, is the way that things seem not to go their way. You see, this devoted couple was struggling

with infertility. They were getting on in years and had not been able to have any children. In a world where fertility was a sign of God's favor the skeptics must have wondered about why these two didn't have a full house. Maybe they, themselves wondered if they'd missed the mark, accidentally done something wrong, or angered God in some accidental way. Or maybe they were just tired. Tired of waiting, tired of working hard to do the right things, tired of showing up and being priestly and righteous and blameless, tired of wondering if they had built their lives on the *wrong* news. Tired of wanting a child, a purpose, a legacy, a mark to leave in this world, one that could carry their name, their story, their family into a future that they would not live to see.

Maybe they were weary.

That could potentially explain Zechariah's disbelief at the angel's *good* news. After all, we know a little something about getting our hopes up only to have them crushed by disappointment when things do not work out as planned, when dreams fail to become reality. We know how painful it is to deal with that kind of loss and we know how much strength it takes to find the courage to dream again, with the aftertaste of failure and disappointment still marinating on our tongues.

How can joy possibly arrive in times like these? How *can* our weary world, our weary church, or our weary selves rejoice?

Well, lucky for us, there are many who claim to have some answers to these questions. There are plenty of self-help books that offer their tried and true formulas towards happiness and satisfaction. There is a whole slew of life coaches who offer their advice on how to rearrange your calendar to create space for joy and the things that are sure to bring it. But what all of these coaches and authors miss is that joy - at least for those of us who believe in God - is not an emotion, is not a human reaction to a pleasant set of circumstances. Rather, joy is a gift of the Spirit that graces our lives even when we least expect it.

Joy, (like grace,) is the result of being loved by God. It is a gift that no one and no experience can steal. It is ours to claim and enjoy and share with others as we rejoice. Joy is a gift!

The German theologian Jurgen Moltmann describes joy as a gift that results from being truly loved. He actually used a German word that doesn't translate really well but essentially means *beheldness*. To be beheld IS to experience joy. And to be beheld essentially means to be loved, not because of anything we did to deserve it, not because we are particularly good or beautiful or righteous... but because... because we are.<sup>1</sup>

But how can anyone (even those of us who know that we are beheld and beloved) how can any of us rejoice in this world that is so broken, so violent, so divided, so angry, so opinionated, so desperate, so fearful, so... weary from it all.. how can we rejoice? Isn't it naive at best and irresponsible at worst - to seek joy much less to discover, and receive, and proclaim joy in the midst of such pain and suffering?

Well some might say it is... But others - like Tricia Hersey - say that this is precisely what we must do.<sup>2</sup> We must still experience joy, receive it for the gift that it is, and we must bravely proclaim it as an act of resistance against all the forces that want to take it away.

It is precisely IN our world so full of violence, division, anger, poverty, and desperation *that* JOY must persist, because joy is a gift from God and God is still giving, despite our best efforts to snuff God out. God still *is*. Therefore, joy still *is*.

American poet, Ross Gay, researches joy and has published a collection of essays on it. In that collection, he comes to the conclusion that joy is related to our very survival. Here's a glimpse at how he came to that conclusion:

*What [...] if joy is not separate from pain?  
What if joy and pain are fundamentally tangled up with one another?  
Or even more to the point, what if joy*

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Bowler talks with Miroslav Volf about a conversation with Jurgen Moltmann, <https://www.tiktok.com/@katecbowler/video/7243786297066786090> and [https://katebowler.com/podcasts/miroslav\\_volf/](https://katebowler.com/podcasts/miroslav_volf/)

<sup>2</sup> Tricia Hersey. *Rest is Resistance*. This is one of the underlying themes of the book. While Hersey does not explicitly write a theology of joy, she does connect the divine gift of joy as a result of the necessity of rest.

*is not only entangled with pain,  
or suffering, or sorrow,  
but is also what emerges  
from how we care for each other through those things?*

*What if joy, instead of refuge or relief from heartbreak,  
is what effloresces from us  
as we help each other carry our heartbreaks?  
Which is to say, what if joy needs sorrow?<sup>3</sup>*

*[he continues]...*

*My hunch is that joy is an ember for or precursor  
to wild  
and unpredictable  
and transgressive  
and un-bounded solidarity.*

*And that that solidarity might incite further joy?  
Which might incite further solidarity. And on and on.*

*My hunch is that joy, emerging from our common sorrow - which does  
not necessarily mean we have the same sorrows,  
but that we, in common, sorrow — might draw us together.  
It might depolarize us  
and de-atomize us enough  
that we can consider what, in common, we love.*

*And though attending to what we hate in common is too often all the  
rage (and it happens also to be very big business),  
noticing what we love in common, and studying that,  
might help us survive.  
[That is] why I think of joy, which gets us to love,  
as being a practice of survival.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Ross Gay, *Incitements of Joy*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 8-9.

Sometimes though, joy just isn't within reach. Like Zechariah whose disbelief initially got in the way of joy, WE struggle to imagine a joyful world and a joy-filled life. But if I might offer a little spoiler...

If we stay *with* the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth just 9 more months and a few more verses of Luke's Gospel, we will discover that before too long, Zechariah's weary silence becomes a joyful song. A response to the gift of God who was already at work, long before Zechariah ever dreamt it was possible.

Friends, on this first Sunday of Advent, though we may feel overwhelmed by bad news, troubling news, confusing news, fear-mongering news... we are invited to receive the *good* news, and to hold out hope that joy is still possible. (But it's) More than that, we are called to proclaim with our words and our lives that joy is already present, because joy is a gift from God and God is here with us now.

Maybe we can't see it because we're so tired, so jaded, so wounded by the pain and sorrows of this world that joy seems impossible to find. Maybe we have started to believe that the pursuit of joy or the *hope* for joy is naive and irresponsible.

But maybe, just maybe if we begin by confessing our weariness, which really is us just being honest about our humanity rather than running around like toddlers pretending we aren't tired, imagining we can somehow be superhuman and stay awake all through the night without facing the consequences when the dawn breaks through.

Maybe then we might recognize that our weariness is keeping us from the joy that is trying to break through. And so maybe if we want to rejoice *even in the midst of our sorrow*, we have to first admit that we are tired, that we are weary, ... that we are merely human... but that in our human state, we are loved and held by God. We are beloved and beheld.

And as we wake up to this reality, perhaps we might find that somehow, some way...even in our weary world, joy abounds.

Amen.