

Here we are, the final week of our Advent journey—the Fourth Sunday of Advent. We started Week One with the theme of Peace. Rhett Parham, one of our church members, brought us a message of peace so beautifully. And then, we moved to the Second Sunday of Advent with the theme of Hope. On that day, Pastor Tone, our Associate Pastor, brought the message of hope meaningfully to us. And then last week, of course, we talked about Love. One of our young adults, Nari Molimau, brought us a heartfelt message of Love. Rhett, Pastor Tone, and Nari have done a great job leading us to the last concept of Advent—Joy—for today. Thank you, Rhett, Pastor Tone, and Nari, for sharing your message with us and preparing us for today—the day of joy.

Some of us noticed that the theme for each Sunday this year's Advent is in a different order compared to the previous years. Yes, it is different. We've made this change intentionally. If you google to find the right order of Advent themes, you may confuse more because you would find many different order variations. There is no right or wrong order as long as we come to God with a sincere and open heart. Simply, a theme is given to each Sunday so we can unite in our desire to quiet our hearts during a hectic holiday season and worship our Lord, Jesus Christ.

So, today at Kona United Methodist Church, we have JOY on this Fourth Sunday of Advent. As I thought of joy for today, joy for this holy season of Advent and Christmas, I couldn't help but think of those who are in the pain of loss—the loss of loved ones, the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, and the loss of health particularly in the era of COVID-19 pandemic. I also thought of those struggling with infertility, especially during this season of conception and the birth of God's Son, Jesus.

If you are one of the persons grieving in silence during this season of Advent—the season expecting people to be merry—I would like to assure you that it is ok not to be merry for this season. I say this because God has promised you and me that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we fear nothing because our Emmanuel God is with us.

We all have bad days in our lives. We all get discouraged occasionally. That is one of the reasons why we can identify ourselves with King David in Psalm

30. Everything seemed bleak during the early part of King David's life as his enemies were many, including the national enemies of his people and personal enemies such as Saul, the king. However, King David continued to express confidence and hope in God. This undying confidence in God was the rock of King David's hope.

Many of us know the call-response of "God is good all the time." Right? One says, "God is good," and others respond by saying, "All the time." If one says, "All the time," others respond by saying, "God is good." Right? This call-response is the solid rock of hope King David stood on in the Book of Psalm, Chapter 30.

God's anger lasts only for a moment, but His favor lasts for a lifetime (Psalm 30:5). He turns the silence of the sorrowful night into the singing praises of the joyful morning (Psalm 30:11-12). No more silence of sorrow but singing praises of joy was King David's. That's the way God gives the gift of joy to God's people.

We can also see this pattern of God's joy-giving in the story of Zechariah, the Priest, the husband of Mary's cousin Elizabeth when he was told that he and his wife Elizabeth would become parents in their old age. He did not quite believe this foretold great joy offered to him. In his disbelief, he demanded a sign. And then, he was struck silent on the spot and remained in silence for the duration of Elizabeth's pregnancy until he was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesized immediately with singing praises of joy after he named his son John the Baptist.

Zechariah's silence is not just about the silence in speaking as we usually think of, but it is also about the silence in hearing. Zechariah's deafness is often unnoticed in the story because it is not explicitly stated in the Bible. But, if we read the Gospel of Luke 1:62 carefully, we can see a sign of his deafness—people **making signs** to communicate to Zechariah. If he could hear, they would have just spoken to him. Right?

So, I wonder why would God silence Zechariah both in speaking and hearing? Why is Zechariah being punished for not believing? Can God really fault the guy for being taken off guard by a heavenly messenger and what seemed like an impossible promise? Can God not give him a minute to let it all sink in?

Then I realized that, through the gift of silence, God gave Zechariah time to inspect, reflect, and repent for cultivating new awareness of God's loving, reconciling, restoring presence and actions of past, present, and future in life. To

fully capture his attention to God, God silenced Zechariah both in speaking and hearing to the world around him. In silence, he listened to God and tuned himself with God more fully for accepting the great joy gifted to him.

The great gift of joy has been given to us also on the first Christmas Day. To accept this gift of joy, we are to be silent to the hectic world and listen to God. Being a good listener requires being silent. Probably, that's why the words "listen," and "silent" have the same letters.

The advent journey is all about practicing this—being silent to the hectic world and listening to God for accepting the incarnated gift of joy, Jesus Christ, who came to us on the first Christmas Day. May the journey of Advent turn the silence of mourning—M.O.U.R.I.N.G—to the joy of morning praises—by responding to the call of "God is Good" with the saying of "All the time." God is good all the time. And, all the time, God is good. Amen.