

Welcome here. I am so happy to see you. Let's pray.

God of peace, continue to give us patience as we continue to wait for your arrival. Help us to orient ourselves towards joy. Amen.

Good news, folks. We are halfway there! Two weeks down and two weeks to go. Light is seeping through. Our project is starting to take shape. If this was an out-and-back, it would be time to turn around. There is a rush of exhilaration as we realize – we can do this. Or maybe you have suddenly become painfully aware of your blisters, or you have run out of paint, and it feels unimaginable that you still have half the way to go. Two weeks ago we started this uncomfortable journey of waiting together. Today, we continue to wait.

#### WAIT FOR THE LORD

Let us read from Isaiah 12: 2-6

Surely God is my salvation;

I will trust and not be afraid.

The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense;

he has become my salvation."

With joy you will draw water

from the wells of salvation.

In that day you will say:

"Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name;

make known among the nations what he has done,

and proclaim that his name is exalted.

Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things;  
let this be known to all the world.  
Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion,  
for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.”

Today’s advent chapel is about joy. When I think of joy I think of two things... Oh, no sorry. Wrong picture. Not my two children Emmett and Leo, Joy from Inside Out and Marie Kondo.

In Inside Out 1, Joy is stuck on the idea of getting Riley back to how she used to be, mistakenly thinking that change is bad and scary.

Marie Kondo became a household name when she sparked a cleaning revolution built on the premise of asking “Does this spark joy?” when decluttering. Today, this is the question I want to challenge you with. Where are you getting stuck on something that might not be what’s best for you? Thinking back to the Work of Art book from last week, what paragraphs need to be rewritten? Where in your life could you mess things up to make things better?

We left Sam and Morley in the middle of their projects. They are working hard – sometimes late into the night, but things aren’t going to plan and the deadline of Christmas morning is approaching.

STORY

## KNITTING PICTURE

Sam and Morley both needed help from someone else. They got to the point where their expectations were unrealistic and it wasn't fun anymore. .

Morley had to let go of her vision for the chair. Morley could have kept going with the corduroy. She could've stayed up all night and invested more of her time and energy into making something that wouldn't look that good and Sam wouldn't like. Sam had to let go of his vision for Stephanie's jacket and then his vision for the scarf...

They had to let go and orient themselves towards a better option. They had to listen to someone else, let go of their pride, take the advice and follow a different plan. A plan that may ultimately lead them to Joy.

Jesus' birth was not Mary and Joseph's plan. It was not their plan for Mary to be a pregnant virgin, carrying the messiah. Not their plan to have the baby in an inn, full of stinky, noisy animals. To lay their baby in a manger of hay. It wasn't what the Jewish people were expecting of the coming Messiah either. But we know the Christmas story is bursting at the seams with Joy.

## CANDLE LIGHTING

## SIBLING PICTURE

I told you two weeks ago that I am a middle child. But what you should also know is that I am just kind of... mid. I have never been the best player on a sports team, or the fastest, smartest, prettiest, nicest, and definitely not the coolest person in my friend group - never the anything-est. I am not very good at singing, never completed level ten piano and the only way to describe my dancing ability is decidedly Mennonite. I'm pretty good at math and I can deep clean a bathroom until it glistens and gleams, but unfortunately neither of those things made me popular in high school. And I should be clear, I'm not looking for compliments, or pity. I'm just stating facts. After 32 years on this earth, I'm finally starting to realize that maybe these aren't actually the things that matter. One of the things that has helped me experience joy in the past few years is relieving myself of the burden of caring so much about the opinions of others. Sing because you want to. Play a sport, miss a pass and shake it off. Learn a new board game and lose- in fact, get your butt kicked. Realize that this says nothing about your value as a person. Put your hand up in class, get the answer wrong and know that it doesn't make you stupid, it just means... you got the answer wrong.

## NIAGARA FALLS PICTURE

Let go of feeling like you need to be perfect. Let go of thinking that if you aren't the best at something you shouldn't do it. Let go of caring so much about what other people think of you.

Learn from Sam and Morley, put your pride to the side, let go of needing to be right so that you can let other people help you orient yourself towards joy.

Reject the idea that you need to do it alone and embrace asking for help.

Let go of your birth plan and embrace having your sweet baby in a stinky manger.

#### SKATING PICTURE

Let go of these things, so that you can hold on tight to the things that are important to you. And let go of the idea that those things need to stay the same from year to year. Leave yourself space to grow and adjust and change. Spend time with the people you love, doing what brings you joy.

Set down unrealistic expectations to let yourself enjoy things that are less than perfect.

It won't always be easy. In fact, I can guarantee there are times it will be very difficult. Especially when you don't get things you really, truly hoped for. But I pray that you will have a loving community around you to lean on when it's hard, and that you will be the shoulders others lean on when they struggle. And remember that there is a good God who loves and cares for you, even if you are a bad dancer, or can't run very fast.

#### JOY TO THE WORLD

God of joy, help us to put our energy into the important things this busy, bustling holiday season. Allow us to set down that which is no longer serving us and to hold tightly to that which is. Give us patience and grace as we walk through these final weeks of advent together. Amen.