

Psalm 126
I Thessalonians 5:16-28

CHRISTMAS CAROL CHARACTERS #3
"FEZZIWIG & JOY"

(Before scripture)

THIS IS THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

IT MARKS THE HALFWAY POINT BETWEEN THE BEGINNING OF THE SEASON AND OUR CELEBRATION OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS.

AS WITH SO MANY THINGS IN LIFE, IT SEEMS TO BE MOVING MUCH TOO QUICKLY, DOESN'T IT?

THAT IS, IF YOU'RE AN ADULT.

FOR CHILDREN, THE DAYS ARE CREEPING BY WITH A TORTUROUS, TURTLE-LIKE SLOWNESS!

AND YET, HERE WE ARE – HALFWAY THROUGH THE SEASON.

WE'VE BEEN COMPARING THE THEMES OF ADVENT TO SOME OF THE CHARACTERS IN CHARLES DICKENS'

A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

WE BEGAN WITH SCROOGE'S BUSINESS PARTNER, JACOB MARLEY, WHO REPRESENTED *HOPE*.

LAST WEEK, IT WAS SCROOGE'S NEPHEW, FRED, WHO STOOD FOR *FAITH*.

TODAY, IT'S HIS FIRST BOSS, FEZZIWIG, WHO IS A SYMBOL OF THE THEME FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT – *JOY*.

MANY OF YOU KNOW THAT THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY IS A SET OF SUGGESTED READINGS FOR EACH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR.

THERE'S AN OLD TESTAMENT READING, A PSALM, A GOSPEL, AND AN EPISTLE THAT ARE OFFERED FOR EACH WEEK.

THERE'S A THREE-YEAR CYCLE, SO THE READINGS ARE ONLY REPEATED ONCE EVERY THREE YEARS.

HERE AT EASTMINSTER, SOMETIMES WE FOLLOW THE LECTIONARY & SOMETIMES WE DON'T.

FOR THE MOST PART, DURING ADVENT THIS YEAR, WE *ARE* FOLLOWING IT & IT'S BEEN AMAZING TO ME HOW CLOSELY THE READINGS FIT BOTH THE THEMES & THE CHARACTERS WE'RE USING.

TODAY IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THAT.

OUR PSALM FOR THE DAY IS PSALM 126 & OUR NEW TESTAMENT READING IS I THESSALONIANS 5:11-28.

(After scripture)

FEZZIWIG.

THE MERE SOUND OF HIS NAME MAKES YOU SMILE, DOESN'T IT?

AND WHAT IF YOU WERE TO SAY IT THREE TIMES REAL FAST?

FEZZIWIG, FEZZIWIG, FEZZIWIG.

AND WHAT IF A WHOLE LOT OF PEOPLE WERE SAYING IT THREE TIMES REAL FAST?

LET'S TRY IT.

NO, I'M SERIOUS. ON THE COUNT OF THREE.

1-2-3 – "FEZZIWIG, FEZZIWIG, FEZZIWIG."

OKAY, NOW FOR THOSE WHO DIDN'T THINK I WAS SERIOUS & JUST DID IT SOFTLY, LET'S TRY AGAIN.

1-2-3 – *“FEZZIWIG, FEZZIWIG, FEZZIWIG!”*

SEE? I TOLD YOU IT WOULD MAKE YOU SMILE.

THAT'S THE ROLE THAT FEZZIWIG PLAYS IN A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

HE MAKES US SMILE. HE MAKES US LAUGH.

FOR EBENEZER SCROOGE, IT WAS A SMILE & LAUGHTER THAT WERE TINGED WITH REGRET – REGRET FOR WHAT HE HAD FAILED TO INCORPORATE INTO HIS LIFE THAT HE COULD HAVE LEARNED FROM HIS FORMER EMPLOYER.

WE MEET FEZZIWIG IN JUST ONE SCENE IN A CHRISTMAS CAROL AS SCROOGE IS ACCOMPANIED BY THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST TO THE WAREHOUSE WHERE HE APPRENTICED AS A YOUNG MAN.

WHEN HE FIRST SETS EYES ON HIS OLD BOSS, WE GET A SENSE THAT SCROOGE HAS BEGUN TO CHANGE, BECAUSE HE – AS DICKENS WRITES *“...CRIED OUT IN GREAT EXCITEMENT: ‘WHY IT’S OLD FEZZIWIG. BLESS HIS HEART; IT’S FEZZIWIG ALIVE AGAIN!’”*

HE WAS CLEARLY A MAN SCROOGE HAD DEARLY LOVED IN HIS YOUTH.

IN THIS SCENE FROM THE PAST, THE CLOCK STRIKES 7 AND FEZZIWIG ORDERS SCROOGE & HIS FELLOW APPRENTICE, DICK WILKINS, TO CLOSE UP SHOP FOR THE DAY.

THE 7:00 O’CLOCK CLOSING IS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE THE NORMAL END OF THE WORKING DAY WOULD HAVE BEEN 9.

FEZZIWIG IS CLOSING DOWN TWO HOURS EARLY ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

CONTRAST THIS WITH SCROOGE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NOVEL, WHERE HE KEEPS THE OFFICE OPEN UNTIL THE LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT ON CHRISTMAS EVE & THEN – IN THAT MEMORABLE LINE – REFERS TO CHRISTMAS AS *“A POOR EXCUSE FOR PICKING A MAN’S POCKET EVERY TWENTY-FIFTH OF DECEMBER!”*

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN FEZZIWIG & SCROOGE IS EVEN GREATER, THOUGH, BECAUSE – NOT ONLY DOES FEZZIWIG CLOSE DOWN THE WAREHOUSE TWO HOURS EARLY – HE DOES IT SO THAT IT CAN BE PREPARED FOR A GREAT FESTIVE PARTY THAT HE & HIS WIFE WILL HOST.

YES, FEZZIWIG IS A SYMBOL OF JOY, *“LAUGHING ALL OVER HIMSELF”* AND CALLING OUT THINGS LIKE *“YO HO!”* & *“HILLI-HO!”*

HE’S A GREAT SYMBOL FOR THIS, THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

THE PASSAGES WE’VE READ TODAY ARE BUT TWO OF LITERALLY HUNDREDS IN THE BIBLE THAT MAKE REFERENCE TO JOY OR SOME DERIVATIVE OF THE WORD.

IN THE CHRISTMAS STORY ITSELF, WHAT DOES THE ANGEL SAY TO THE SHEPHERDS?

“BEHOLD, I BRING YOU GOOD NEWS OF A GREAT JOY...!”

IN WHAT WE KNOW AS “THE MAGNIFICAT,” HOW DOES MARY BEGIN HER SONG?

“MY SOUL MAGNIFIES THE LORD & MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR!”

IT'S INTERESTING THAT THAT PASSAGE – THE MAGNIFICAT – IS AN ALTERNATE PSALM FOR TODAY – A PASSAGE IN LUKE AS AN ALTERNATE PSALM!

IT'S A SONG OF JOY!

GO BACK AGAIN TO THE BEGINNING OF A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

WHEN CAROLERS APPROACH SCROOGE, THEY'RE SINGING "GOD REST YE, MERRY GENTLEMEN."

WHAT'S THE CHORUS OF THAT CAROL?

"TIDINGS OF COMFORT & JOY!"

MANY OF YOU WILL REMEMBER GRADY NUTT FROM THE OLD "HEE HAW" SHOW.

THEY CALLED HIM "THE PRIME MINISTER OF HUMOR."

HE HAD A WONDERFUL WAY OF MIXING UPROARIOUS LAUGHTER WITH PROFOUND TRUTH.

GRADY NUTT SAID THAT "LAUGHTER IS THE HAND OF GOD ON THE SHOULDER OF A TROUBLED WORLD."

WHAT A WONDERFUL WAY OF PUTTING IT.

WHAT A WONDERFUL WAY OF SAYING THAT THERE IS JOY TO BE FOUND IN THIS WORLD, EVEN IN THE MIDST OF DIFFICULTIES.

IT WAS CHESTERTON WHO SAID, AS ONLY CHESTERTON COULD, THAT "ANGELS CAN FLY BECAUSE THEY TAKE THEMSELVES SO LIGHTLY."

IN ESSENCE, CHESTERTON WAS SAYING – LONG BEFORE IT BECAME POPULAR TO SAY IT – "LIGHTEN UP! HAVE SOME JOY IN YOUR LIFE!"

WE HAVE TO BE CAREFUL, THOUGH, THAT WE DON'T SIMPLY EQUATE JOY WITH LAUGHTER, SMILES, HUMOR & FRIVOLITY.

IN THE BIBLE, IT'S SOMETHING FAR MORE PROFOUND THAN THAT.

IN THE PSALM WE READ, THE PEOPLE ARE – INTERESTINGLY, SINCE WE'RE FOCUSING ON A CHRISTMAS CAROL – LOOKING AT JOY IN THE PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE.

THE PSALMIST REMINDS THEM OF WHAT GOD HAS DONE IN THE PAST, WHAT GOD IS DOING IN THE PRESENT, AND WHAT GOD PROMISES TO DO IN THE FUTURE.

THE POINT IS – GOD IS ALWAYS WITH US, IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE OF LIFE.

THAT'S WHAT BRINGS US JOY.

JOY ISN'T SOMETHING THAT CAN BE PRODUCED.

IT'S NOT SOMETHING WE CAN GET WITH A COUPON AT MACY'S.

YOU CAN'T GET JOY IN A MUG AT BAR LOUIE'S.

YOU CAN'T DOWNLOAD JOY.

YOU CAN'T WIN IT WITH A LOTTERY TICKET OR BY WORKING LONGER HOURS OR MAKING MORE MONEY.

YOU CAN'T TURN IT ON WITH A REMOTE CONTROL OR DISCOVER IT ON A JOURNEY TO A FOREIGN LAND.

YOU CAN'T EARN IT & YOU CAN'T INHERIT IT.

LIKE ALL EXPRESSIONS OF GRACE, ALL YOU CAN DO IS RECEIVE IT AS A GIFT – A GIFT GIVEN BY GOD.

YOU SEE, THAT'S WHY PAUL SAYS TO THE THESSALONIANS – AND TO US – *“REJOICE ALWAYS, PRAY WITHOUT CEASING, GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES!”*

NOTICE – PAUL DOESN'T SAY *“GIVE THANKS FOR ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.”*

THERE ARE, TO BE SURE, CIRCUMSTANCES IN LIFE FOR WHICH NO ONE CAN GIVE THANKS.

NOT EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE THAT COMES TO US IN LIFE IS OF GOD'S MAKING.

EVIL IS VERY REAL & VERY PRESENT IN THIS WORLD.

NEVERTHELESS, THERE IS NO CIRCUMSTANCE IN LIFE THAT IS BEYOND GOD'S REACH & GOD'S POWER.

GOD IS IN THE MIDST OF ALL CIRCUMSTANCES IN LIFE & IT'S THAT ASSURANCE THAT IS THE SOURCE OF OUR JOY.

THE GREAT WRITER & PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER, FREDERICK BUECHNER, PUTS IT LIKE THIS:

“GOD CREATED US IN JOY AND CREATED US FOR JOY, AND IN THE LONG RUN NOT ALL THE DARKNESS THERE IS IN THE WORLD AND IN OURSELVES CAN SEPARATE US FINALLY FROM THAT JOY.

WHATEVER ELSE IT MEANS TO SAY THAT WE ARE CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE, I THINK IT MEANS THAT EVEN WHEN WE CANNOT BELIEVE IN GOD, EVEN WHEN WE FEEL MOST SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT & DESERTED, GOD'S MARK IS DEEP WITHIN US. WE HAVE GOD'S JOY IN OUR BLOOD.”

LET'S GO BACK TO FEZZIWIG & SCROOGE.

I THINK FEZZIWIG HAD BOTH KINDS OF JOY – THE KIND THAT ERUPTS IN LAUGHTER, SMILES & FRIVOLITY AS WELL AS THAT WHICH IS DEEP-ROOTED & PROFOUND.

AT THE END OF THE EVENING IN SCROOGE'S VISIT, DICKENS TELLS US THAT *“MR. & MRS. FEZZIWIG TOOK THEIR STATIONS, ONE ON EITHER SIDE OF THE DOOR, AND SHAKING HANDS WITH EVERY PERSON INDIVIDUALLY AS HE OR SHE WENT OUT, WISHED HIM OR HER A MERRY CHRISTMAS.”*

THAT, IN ITSELF, IS ADMIRABLE.

BUT I THINK IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHO WAS THERE.

IN DESCRIBING WHO CAME, DICKENS SAYS, *“IN THEY ALL CAME, ONE AFTER ANOTHER; SOME SHYLY, SOME BOLDLY, SOME GRACEFULLY, SOME AWKWARDLY, SOME PUSHING, SOME PULLING, IN THEY ALL CAME, ANYHOW & EVERYHOW.”*

I THINK WE'RE BEING TOLD THAT THEY WERE COMING FROM ALL BACKGROUNDS & ALL STATIONS IN SOCIETY.

THE BALL – THE PARTY – THE CELEBRATION – WAS OPEN TO EVERYONE.

ISN'T THAT WHAT THE ANGEL SAID TO THE SHEPHERDS?

“I BRING YOU GOOD NEWS OF A GREAT JOY THAT SHALL BE FOR ALL THE PEOPLE!”

THE JOY OF GOD'S PRESENCE IS FOR EVERYONE.

LET'S GO BACK & TAKE A LOOK AT THE IMPACT THIS VISIT TO FEEZIWIG HAD ON SCROOGE.

AS THE PARTY ENDS & AS HE AND THE SPIRIT ARE ABOUT TO MAKE THEIR DEPARTURE FROM LOOKING IN ON THE FESTIVITIES, THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST NOTICES THAT SCROOGE IS VISIBLY UPSET.

DICKENS WRITES, “*HE FELT THE SPIRIT’S GLANCE, AND STOPPED.*

‘WHAT IS THE MATTER?’ ASKED THE GHOST.

‘NOTHING IN PARTICULAR,’ SAID SCROOGE.

‘SOMETHING, I THINK?’ THE GHOST INSISTED.

NO,’ SAID SCROOGE, ‘NO, I SHOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO SAY A WORD OR TWO TO MY CLERK JUST NOW. THAT’S ALL.’”

SCROOGE HAS SEEN THE KIND OF JOY THAT’S POSSIBLE TO GIVE TO ANOTHER & HE LONGS FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE THAT JOY.

THE IRONY, THOUGH, IS THAT HIS CLERK, BOB CRATCHIT, ALREADY HAS THE DEEP & PROFOUND JOY WITHIN HIM THAT SCROOGE IS JUST BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND.

IT’S THE JOY THAT FEELS THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.

IT’S A JOY THAT LOOKS BEYOND THE DIFFICULTIES OF LIFE TO SOMETHING OF GREATER SIGNIFICANCE.

IT’S A JOY THAT WILL REQUIRE VISITS FROM TWO MORE SPIRITS FOR SCROOGE TO FULLY UNDERSTAND IT.

IT’S A JOY FOR THOSE WHO FIND IT DIFFICULT TO CELEBRATE AT THIS TIME OF YEAR.

ANN WEEMS HAS A WONDERFUL POEM FOR JUST THOSE PEOPLE.

IT GOES LIKE THIS –

“NOT CELEBRATE?

YOUR BURDEN IS TOO GREAT TO BEAR?

YOUR LONELINESS IS INTENSIFIED DURING THE SEASON?

YOUR TEARS SEEM TO HAVE NO END?

NOT CELEBRATE?

YOU SHOULD LEAD THE CELEBRATION!

YOU SHOULD RUN THROUGH THE STREETS

TO RING THE BELLS AND SING THE LOUDEST!

YOU SHOULD FLING THE TINSEL ON THE TREE,

AND OPEN YOUR HOUSE TO YOUR NEIGHBORS

AND CALL THEM IN TO DANCE!

FOR IT IS YOU ABOVE ALL OTHERS

WHO KNOW THE JOY OF ADVENT.

IT IS UNTO YOU THAT A SAVIOR IS BORN THIS DAY.

ONE WHO COMES TO LIFT YOUR BURDEN FROM YOUR SHOULDERS,

ONE WHO COMES TO WIPE THE TEARS FROM YOUR EYES.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE,

FOR HE IS BORN THIS DAY TO YOU.”

IT'S THAT DEEP & PROFOUND JOY THAT KNOWS THAT, EVEN IN PAIN & ANGUISH, GOD IS THERE – IN THE MIDST OF THE PAIN & IN THE HEART OF THE ANGUISH.

LIVE WITH THAT ASSURANCE THIS SEASON & LET THE KIND OF JOY IT ENGENDERS COME ALIVE INSIDE OF YOU.

AND IN THOSE TIMES WHEN IT'S HARD TO REMEMBER IT – THOSE TIMES WHEN IT'S HARD TO LAUGH AND HARD TO SMILE – WELL, WHY NOT JUST TRY IT – “FEZZIWIG, FEZZIWIG, FEZZIWIG.”

SAY IT OUT LOUD IN A CROWDED STORE & IT MIGHT ELICIT SOME STRANGE LOOKS, BUT IT MAY VERY WELL JUST MAKE SOMEONE ELSE SMILE RIGHT ALONG WITH YOU!

WHAT YOU'RE REALLY SAYING IS “JOY TO THE WORLD! THE LORD IS COME!”

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