

CRIBB<S>NOTE - December 14, 2008

It may seem rather odd to combine “joy” with “suffering,” yet that is exactly what happens when we recount the cries of the people of Israel upon their return from exile. Joy is inspired by memory of events that shaped the history of a people who had known greatness and bitterness.

They remembered the promise of God to their ancestors Abraham and Sarah that from them would come a multitude of descendants; more people than could be measured by the grains of sand or stars scattered in the sky. They recalled the exodus from bondage in Egypt and the long trek through the wilderness where everyone was fed from the hand of God. The incalculable love of God sustained them through the best and worst of times. Amid their travail someone penned, “Joy comes in the morning.”

When we may least expect a good outcome something happens that can cause us to re-focus and take note again. Even when everything around us suggests there is nothing to shout about, joy comes and rearranges the complete scenario. Bad news may surround us, but joy breaks through and gives us heft. That is what shouts of joy really mean. At our wit’s end when nothing seems to satisfy our need, the intangible hand sweeps across our lives with unexpected and surprising joy.

We don’t mock those who suffer. We don’t minimize our circumstances. We don’t ignore reality or pretend things aren’t what they seem. The twists and turns of life can place us in miserable and incredible situations that are beyond our ability to maneuver or adjust. The very core of our existence is challenged beyond our imagination. That is prime time for God’s amazing presence. In the silent, stilled moments of despair comes another Word. Joy!

To the uninitiated, the unbeliever, the inexperienced...such confidence seems inappropriate, impossible, and out of place. It is hard to accept the inexplicable gift of grace and God’s love. Joy is pressed upon our souls as an energy source that elevates us ‘to keep on keeping on’.

Folk who have been on the other side of joy have a depth of understanding about the magnificent visitation of timely relief. That is how Psalm 126 was written. How can we dismiss the clear cry for renewal?

“Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.” (Psalm 126:5-6)

Captured is the reversal of reality. Circumstances change. The toil of unbearable conditions will no longer define the outcome. There is a kind of cosmic telescope that peers into the moment and spies another possibility.

Isn’t that what Christmas is all about? Don’t we find ourselves shifting our attitude and making adjustments during this sacred season? We connect with the poor and vulnerable. We rearrange priorities and significant relationships take on even deeper meaning. There is joy and like its contagious nature requires it cannot be hidden, hoarded, or kept secretly locked away. Instead, the explosion of joy’s universal appeal spreads and transforms the world.