

DELIGHT CAN'T WAIT

December 11, 2022

Preaching: Michael Swartzentruber, Senior Minister



ISAIAH 35:1-10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
'Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.'

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,*
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God's people;
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.
No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.
And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

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REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase or image stands out to you?
2. This week's Advent theme is "joy." When was the last time you experienced deep and moving joy? What happened and what has stuck with you?
3. What does joy mean? How do you cultivate joy in your life?
4. This passage is jarring when read in its surrounding context. The people of Israel are despairing as they suffer in exile from their home and see it laid to waste: streams "turned to pitch" and soil to sulfur (34:9). Then—boom!—the land itself will rejoice and bloom (35:1). Reflect on a time when your sorrow or sadness was turned suddenly or unexpectedly into joy. What was that like? How did you experience God in that?
5. One of South Elkhorn's values is "contagious joy." In what ways have you experienced joy spreading from others? Who in your life spreads joy and how do they do that?
6. God wants us to live with joy, not fake optimism or forced cheeriness. What in your life grounds you in joy? What do you

delight in that fills your soul with meaning, purpose, and energy?

7. Reflect on the "Holy Way" of Isaiah 35:8. It can be read as a path through the desert back to Jerusalem *and* as a "way of life" so compelling and safe and redeeming that everyone who takes part—even "fools"—can find their way home to God and experience transforming joy. How might this translate to the life of faith lived out in community? How do we make the way so wide and beautiful and healing that anyone who wants to can find God's transforming joy?