



Thursday, 12/15/16

PROMISE OF JOY INEXPRESSIBLE

READING: 1 Peter 1:8-9

I love Christmas carols. The tunes are nostalgic and they usher me into the remembrance of family, vacation, food, and the excitement of the season. But because of this familiarity, I sometime miss the meaning. Take for example the refrain of the popular Christmas carol, “O Come O Come Emmanuel”:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel

If you are like me, you probably recited this refrain in the voice of medieval monk!; and perhaps did not capture its essence. But let me rephrase the stanza:

Celebrate! Seriously friends – Get excited! Jesus is with us!

I believe this rendering more closely captures the author’s intent. There is real reason for visceral joy! So, this Christmas I am reminding myself – and apprehending – the joy that is available because Jesus is with us.

Indeed, our reading says that those who love and believe in Jesus – those who Jesus is now with – are filled with “inexpressible and glorious joy.” Allow me to tell my story of experiencing this joy for the first time.

In the summer of 1997 some friends of mine – who had joy that I didn’t – invited me to a conference. Midway through the event the leader did something sneaky. During a backpacking trip one afternoon he said, “Alright, everyone grab your bible. For the next 2 hours I want to find somewhere you can be alone – and pray. Although this prospect did not excite me, I was stuck. I scooped up the bible I had been issued and set off.

Upon arriving in a clearing I sat upon a stump, and opened the bible randomly, and read 1 Peter 1. Although I believed God was real, I had no experience of that “inexpressible and glorious joy” Peter spoke of. So I prayed, “God, I will do anything for this joy,” and sensed Him reply, “Then follow me.”

As I agreed to follow, supernatural joy washed over me. Over the next 30 minutes I jumped up-and-down exclaiming with tears, “I’m going to Heaven!, I’m going to Heaven!” I was changed.

Although this joy has not been constant over the years, it has been real. This Christmas season I stir my affections to append this joy anew. Let us enter together into this promise of inexpressible and glorious joy that is the inheritance of those who believe.

-CH Josh Gilliam