

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, December 24, 2023

"How Does a Weary World Rejoice? We Sing Stories of Hope"

"Young at Heart" Message

As most of you know, we've been working through a sermon series asking the question, "How Does a Weary World Rejoice?"

Today, we respond to this question with, "We Sing Stories of Hope."

I love this week's theme because we aren't just talking about singing songs of hope.

We're talking about singing *stories* of hope. To me, singing stories of hope sounds meaningful – like we're weaving our stories into songs on the tapestries of our hearts.

And this got me thinking about how young people do this.

When kids go to Moravian summer camps, much of what they do is wrapped up in songs. There is tons of music (and by extension, joy) at Moravian summer camps.

Young people form memories around the songs they sing at those ages. And those memories start to weave the fabric of their lives.

And, I bet that for most of us here today, even if we never went to summer camps, there are some songs that have been woven into our consciousness that bring about joy and hope, or at the very least a sense of nostalgia.

So, I thought it might be fun to sing one of these songs today.

The song we're about to sing is, I hope, fairly well known, but if you don't know it, you'll learn it quickly.

And, there are some movements that go along with the song, so if there are any volunteers – young or old – who'd like to join me up front, I'd love to have you.

We'll learn the song and movements together and anyone sitting in their seats can do them, too. They're very easy.

“This Little Light of Mine”

This little light of mine
I'm going to let it shine
Oh, this little light of mine
I'm going to let it shine

This little light of mine
I'm going to let it shine
Let it shine, all the time, let it shine

Hide it under a bushel no
I'm gonna let it shine
Hide it under a bushel no
I'm gonna let it shine

Hide it under a bushel no
I'm gonna let it shine
Let it shine let it shine let it shine

All around the neighbourhood
I'm gonna let it shine
All around the neighbourhood
I'm gonna let it shine

All around the neighbourhood
I'm gonna let it shine
Let it shine let it shine let it shine

Don't let anyone blow it out
I'm gonna let it shine
Don't let anyone blow it out
I'm gonna let it shine

Don't let anyone blow it out
I'm gonna let it shine
Let it shine let it shine let it shine

For many people, adults and children alike, this song is not just a song of hope – it's a story of hope.

It's a story of hope because we all have times in our lives when it feels like someone or something has blown out our light, or we feel like we need to hide our own light from the world for whatever reason.

We all have stories we could share of feeling like we're in the dark and needing a candle of hope to bring us out of darkness.

The Message

So, how does a weary world rejoice? We sing stories of hope.

We have been working through the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke during this series.

In tonight's Candlelight service, we will hear Luke chapter 2, verses 1-20 – the story of the nativity.

But today, we heard the songs of praise and hope that Mary and Zechariah sang.

Both Zechariah and Mary sang their stories of hope after long periods of waiting, and some suffering.

Zechariah and Elizabeth spent most of their lives together with a feeling of shame around their inability to conceive children.

In the ancient world, this is what defined a marriage and family. And, often, if a woman was unable to conceive, her husband would either leave her entirely or he would find another woman who could conceive children.

It wasn't a pleasant experience for women especially, but that pressure was a lot for men, too.

We come into Zechariah's story late in his life because that's when the miracle of conception happens for him and Elizabeth.

But I wonder what his prayers were like for all those years before, when they tried over and over again to have children and were unsuccessful.

I wonder how many times he was angry with God?

I wonder how many of his prayers were filled with frustration rather than hope?

We get to hear his song of hope and praise at this point in his life, but I imagine the younger Zechariah struggled to sing songs of praise.

And, even now, the birth of John did not look how Zechariah imagined or prayed it would look when he was a younger man.

He went through some very difficult and trying times before he uttered the song we heard today.

And, he had to know that the future with this child would not be easy considering his and his wife's advanced age relative to when people typically had children.

And yet, in this moment, he sings this song and praises God – not just for today's blessing, but for the struggle and the challenges and the frustration, too.

His song is not just a song – it is his story.

We also heard Mary's song today – also known as the Magnificat.

Mary – a young, unwed, pregnant woman with an unknown future sings this beautiful song of praise and hope.

And once again, her future does not look anything like she thought it would.

I am certain she never prayed or hoped to be the mother of the Messiah.

She might have prayed for a nice man, a humble man, someone to settle down with and have children. Someone who would love her and care for her and not hurt her.

But she didn't pray to conceive her child through the Holy Spirit before she was even married.

That certainly complicated her life quite a bit.

Tonight, we will hear her story of the birth of Jesus.

But today, we hear Mary singing her story of hope for the unknown future of herself, Joseph, and her unborn child.

Mary has suffered shame, humiliation, and she has asked herself a lot of questions.

And yet, she rejoices through her weariness by singing her song of hope. Her story of hope.

It is much more than just a song of joy. It is her story, her song, her love, her passion, and her faith in God.

Both Zechariah and Mary share with us their stories of hope.

When we feel weary and when we feel like our light isn't shining as bright as we would like or when someone has blown our light out entirely, we can reignite our own flame by singing our own story of hope.

Zechariah and Mary only sang their songs after going through difficult and trying times.

When we are in the midst of difficulty, or when we are feeling like our light has gone out, it can be difficult to sing a song of praise to God.

But in those moments, if you can grasp onto any small glimmer of hope, allow that glimmer to re-ignite your flame.

Singing stories of hope invites us to weave our entire story – the good, the bad, the uncertainty, the worry, the stress, the joy – together into a song of hope and praise.

Sing your story, even if it feels impossible or if it doesn't feel hopeful *right now*.

We cannot predict the future, but we can see from past experience that not every moment of our life is going to be a happy one. We will struggle and we will be challenged.

But through the weariness and the challenges, we can hold onto hope.

God does not just want to hear your story – God sings with you in your weariness.

Sing your song of praise, of joy, and of love.

But also, sing your song of lament, of worry, of frustration, and of sacrifice.

Sing your stories of hope and weave them into the tapestry of your heart – even through your weariness – and let your light shine as bright as you do.

God is listening and loves to hear your voice through it all. Amen.

Let us pray:

God of love and light, we pray this morning that you would open our hearts to your song, and by extension help us to sing our stories from our hearts.

We know that you hear the songs in our hearts even if we don't sing them aloud. But God, we ask that you sing them with us, whether they are songs of joy and praise, or songs of lament and worry and strife.

We rejoice with you through our weariness, and we know you rejoice with us, cry with us, laugh with us, and walk with us.

May you continue to be present even as our stories unfold before our eyes. Even when we are challenged by life and a song of praise cannot be uttered from our lips, we pray that you would be with us on our journeys.

Walk with us, oh God, and sing with us every step of the way. Amen.