



**JESUS' FAMILY**

**TREE**

**ADVENT AT WVC**

**2015**



## 2015 Advent Devotional Jesus' Family Tree

There is an online company that people can subscribe to and discover their ancestors. As of last summer, the company boasted that they provide access to “approximately 16 billion historical records and over 2 million paying subscribers.” Their numbers show that subscribers have created more than 70 million family trees and have added more than 200 million photographs, scanned documents and written stories. That is a lot of family! Reading the list of Jesus' family tree in Matthew 1:1-17 might qualify for that website; it covers thousands of years and multiple generations. Reading through the list of names can feel monotonous, yet all of the people listed have made some contribution to the One whose arrival we celebrate: Jesus. These are names that have faces and stories to tell – it was important enough to Matthew to list them and to God to have them included in Scripture.

This season of Advent, our Sunday sermons will explore just a few of the stories of the people in ***Jesus' Family Tree*** to see a more human side of Jesus, and to find the traditional Advent themes of Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love. To accompany us on that journey, people who are a part of the family tree of West Valley Church have shared about these themes from stories of their own families and lives. The writers of this devotional all have faces and names and stories to tell, too. We pray that the Holy Spirit will use these readings to draw us closer to “God our Father, Christ our Brother” (Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee), and to one another as His family at WVC.

HOPE



# Sunday, November 29, 2015

Some of you know that I have been working on a second graduate degree, called a Master of Divinity, in Missional Leadership. I've been taking classes for the last 2 ½ years. As I write this I am in my very last class (I was able to "walk" in graduation last May, but still had two classes left). It has been a growing but challenging journey. Like many others who have been down this road, I wondered at times if it would ever end. Now the end is in sight and I have hope that I will have a diploma!

In an incredibly small way, I can relate to the hope that is so intimately tied to the season of Advent. For centuries, God's people awaited Christ's first Advent (or arrival). I'm sure they wondered if it would ever happen. Still, they knew where to put their hope – in God's love:

"The Lord delights in those who fear Him,  
who put their hope in His unfailing love."

Psalm 147:11, niv

They knew they could count on that. For those who realized who Jesus was when He arrived, they must have been overjoyed.

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a dream fulfilled is a tree of life."

Proverbs 13:12

Hope has arrived! Jesus is here! Now, we have *all* hope.

"Through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die." (Romans 5:2-7)

Now, we are the people who live with and for Jesus today, and we put our confident hope in His second Advent.

Pastor Mike O'Neill

# Monday, November 30, 2015

“We wait in hope for the Lord; He is our help and our shield.”

Psalm 33:20

My wife and I have a family tradition, like many do, of going up into the mountains to hunt for our Christmas tree. One snowy day in December we took our young family up in the hills on a remote snowy drive in search of an alpine tree. We had a wonderful time playing in the snow and enjoying the cold afternoon. At the time we had three small children, three years old and younger with the youngest being only two months. The day was getting late, especially for the little ones, as we finally picked the perfect tree. As the snow fell we loaded up and tied the tree on top of our SUV. As we were on our way back down through deep snow, our four wheel drive was doing fine until it started to slide on a sheet of ice underneath the snow. This caused the vehicle to slide into a ditch where it became solidly stuck. We tried and tried to get out of the ditch but nothing seemed to work. The day was getting late and now it was pitch black. We hadn't seen a vehicle all afternoon and we felt hopeless. My wife and I decided to say a prayer before I went to look for help. It was unsettling to leave my family behind as I walked down the snowy trail into the darkness. I walked further away from our headlights into the blackness of the cold snowy night and I rounded a bend in the road. That is when I saw a small light turn on.... it was from an RV trailer!!! To my surprise there was a very nice elk hunter inside who owned a jeep with a winch who was more than happy to pull us out of our predicament.

During this advent season let us focus on the Hope that we have in Jesus Christ and may He be the light in our lives during the darkest of night. Amen

Scott Lally



# Tuesday, December 1, 2015

Hope shines the brightest  
in the darkest  
moments

One of my fondest memories growing up is searching the darkening sky for the first twinkling star of the night. I can remember sitting in the window of my mom's room, searching the horizon and when that first star appeared, I would make a wish. Ever since then, I've been fascinated with the night sky. Gazing up at those lights that seem to wink down at us from high up in that silky black sky just seems magical, like we are a small piece of something larger. Just think of all the other people who have sat staring, just as I often do, at the night sky - the Syrian refugees, Martin Luther King Jr., the wise men in search of Jesus.

Jesus.

He is the real hope we have this Christmas season. He was born in a dirty, smelly, and dark manger with only the light from the stars to usher Him into our world. Jesus is our hope that lights up our lives and leads us back to our Father in heaven. Now, every time I find myself star struck, I am reminded of the hope we have in that little babe, born in the manger.

"The hope of the righteous brings joy."  
Proverbs 10:28

Kiley Keller



# Wednesday, December 2, 2015

While on vacation our family of six was wading in the edge of the surf looking for freshly uncovered agates on the Olympic Peninsula's Agate Beach. Agate Beach is a relatively short beach hemmed in on both ends by rocky cliffs. At one end of the beach there is a narrow cleft in the cliff where the surf surges upwards in angry turbulence.

While keeping a close eye on the younger children, I noticed that our oldest son had wandered toward that turbulent end of the beach. Being a very independent boy it was normal for him to explore on his own. So, I wasn't alarmed over his departure from the rest of us. Then I looked his way again and he was nowhere in sight. I went over to that area and he was gone. I climbed up over the cliff for a better view and saw a drift log lodged over the cleft in the rocks where the surf roared in. My heart sank. Knowing his adventuresome spirit I was sure he had tried to walk that slippery wet log across the chasm and fallen into the rolling surf. I panicked. I watched the surging surf, hoping he would surface. Not seeing him I felt totally hopeless and returned to the other end of the beach to tell Patsy. I cannot adequately describe the agonizing hopelessness I felt. Then, to my relief, he appeared nonchalantly circling around the high ground above the beach.

That was a rather short time of self-induced hopelessness, but I learned from that experience to never give up hope again. Since then I have experienced times when about all there was to hang onto was hope. However, in every case God has encouraged me to hang in there with Him in hope. Ultimately my hope in Him has always been rewarded. He is faithful – always.

Pastor Arden Sickenberger





# Thursday, December 3, 2015

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11

In Jeremiah 29:11, God declares that His plans are not to harm us. We have hope and a future in Him. That's good news! I have always believed this and never felt tremendously tested in it.

And then I become a mother.

We were blessed with Jacob 2½ years ago, and it was the day he was born that I really learned what it meant to have anxiety, what it meant to pray fervently, and what it meant to hope. Jeremiah 29:11 rang in my ears. Of course God was not harming me – all sleep deprived, unshowered, anxious me! So along with continuing to hope and trust that God had plans to prosper Matt and me, I learned to confidently hope that He also had plans to prosper our little Jacob! Yes, this was a hard job, but I had hope – and that hope drove my faith.

Sixteen months later, along came another baby! This time we were blessed with a precious daughter, Annelies. Six hours after she was born, we were told she probably had Down Syndrome. A week later, genetic testing confirmed it. For reasons I don't know, Annelies has 47 chromosomes in every cell of her body instead of 46. And yet my hope abounds. If I had been told the day before she was born that she had Down Syndrome, I think I would have felt devastated; but as I held our beautiful new baby in my arms, hope riveted through every bone of my body. Jeremiah 29:11 still rings true!

I felt God by my side when I became a first-time mother to Jacob, and I have really felt Him by my side since Annelies' birth. I don't know what her future holds, but thank God that I am not the keeper of her (or Jacob's!) future! He has already declared that He will prosper them and give them hope and a future. What good news!

My hope lies there.

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for  
and assurance about what we do not see.”

Hebrews 11:1

Lianna Sackmann

# Friday, December 4, 2015

We've all heard it said that the only things that you can be sure of are death and taxes. Others have said that change is the only true constant. However, John 16:33 reminds us that in this world we will also have troubles. No one can escape this truth as every one of us will experience hardships and troubles as we move through life.

This past summer was difficult in many ways for me and my family as we had two key employees take new jobs at work, we had an employee whose young daughter died in a tragic home accident, and a good friend lost her baby in childbirth. Life can hand us troubles that seem too hard to bear and bearing these troubles can be overwhelming, but God does not ask us to do it alone. He gently calls us to share in each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2). Through our willingness to cry out to God (Psalm 34:17-19), to share our troubles, and to carry each other's burdens, we begin to function as the body of Christ, as God intended. It is not easy, but we can be assured that God will be with us (Zephaniah 3:17) and has a plan for us (Jeremiah 29:11).

These truths give us hope and Hope will never let us down. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit we have been showered with love (Romans 5:2-5) and this love gives us motivation to participate in hope. So "cheer up" as God has overcome the world and its troubles.

May God provide hope, as we celebrate the birth of His Son.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD,  
"plans to prosper you and not to harm you,  
plans to give you hope and a future."  
Jeremiah 29:11

"Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love." (Romans 5:2-5)

Scott Stephen and Family

# Saturday, December 5, 2015

Every year I pray for a theme to focus on for the year and a scripture that will help me to grow in my relationship with the Lord. The word I chose for 2015 was HOPE with Romans 15:13 as my key verse. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

We've been studying the book of Daniel in Ladies Bible Study and see Daniel's unwavering hope in God as he prayed daily that the Israelites could return to their homeland after years of captivity in Babylon. Moses, Noah, Abraham – and all the Bible heroes placed their hope in God.

I'm also reminded of the hope that my dear mother had after her loving and devoted husband passed away. Most of her married life my mother suffered with asthma and emphysema resulting in many other illnesses from the side effects of medication. I remember the time she fell and broke both legs due to severe osteoporosis, resulting in surgery and being bedridden for weeks. This was only one of many falls, broken bones and hospital stays she suffered over the years. So, my father was not only her best friend and companion but her caregiver as well as he helped see her through to recovery with each physical setback she experienced.

When my father passed away prematurely we wondered how she would be able to continue to live on her own and care for herself without him by her side. But the hope she carried deep inside from her strong faith in Christ gave her the determination and courage to keep on keeping on. There were many more broken bones and ongoing physical problems resulting in rehab and assisted care after my father died, but hope is what kept her going through a broken heart, sadness, loneliness and illness. Hope that God had a purpose in the events as they happened, hope that her help would come from the Lord, hope that she would be reunited with her husband, parents, and grandparents in eternity someday, hope in the fact she would have a new body free from pain and suffering and most of all the hope of eternal life with Christ.

With God as our hope, placing our trust in Him, we will be filled with joy and peace, giving us more hope, even to overflowing! We all have hope even in times of trouble-God's promises are true. "Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from Him." (Psalm 62:5)

PEACE



# Sunday, December 6, 2015

Psalm 91; John 14

All of us can look back over the last year and recall significant “high” moments. One of those for our family was the wedding of our oldest son. I was honored to be able to perform the ceremony for him and his wonderful new wife; and I can proudly say that I did so nearly tear-free (I did shed one or two...). We are blessed to welcome her, and Shelly is thrilled to finally have another female in our family (and with three boys, perhaps we will have two more daughters-in-love one of these days!). They are a great couple with a bright future ahead as they love each other and seek Jesus in their life and relationship.

One of the meaningful parts of the ceremony was something I hadn't seen before in all of my years of officiating: instead of the usual “unity candle,” the two of them planted a single plant into a clay pot, together pouring dirt in over the roots. Wherever they live, this plant will serve as a reminder of the growth and unity of their relationship. Perhaps one day it will be big enough for our future grandchildren to find shade under. This symbol calls to mind another image: the peace that we find when we rest under and in God.

Read Psalm 91; it describes the strong peace we find as we rest under God's powerful protection. Verse one says, “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” (niv) Because of Jesus (John 14:27), we can be at peace in the shade of God's loving presence in our lives.

Pastor Mike

# Monday, December 7, 2015

I look forward to Christmas every year, primarily for the gathering of family together. The Christmas of 1998 was the first Christmas that truly intermixed joy with sorrow for me. My grandfather had passed away just before Thanksgiving, leaving a gaping hole in our family. While we mourned, we still looked forward to gathering together as a family with my grandma. Our plans were shattered when just days before Christmas my beloved grandmother suffered a stroke, and then another.

Christmas Eve 1998 our family gathered, but this time we gathered in a hospital room, brokenhearted. I don't recall how it happened or whose idea it was, but with our hearts aching, my brother, my cousins and I decided to turn our sorrow towards something productive. That night in Memorial Hospital, we traveled from room to room singing Christmas carols to patients. In this process, even in the midst of one of the darkest nights we had shared together as a family, there was a sense of peace that washed over us.

John 14:27 says,

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.

I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

God's peace doesn't make sense in the midst of our sorrow and circumstances. That's the whole point of it. It's a peace that overcomes the world. It's a peace that transcends all understanding.

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,  
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:7

Grandma made it through that Christmas, and one more after that. This coming Christmas, like all the others before it, our family will gather and remember the Prince of Peace foretold in Isaiah 9:6. And we will remember grandma and grandpa and be thankful that we will reunite with them one day in heaven, all because of that baby in a manger, our Prince of Peace.

Eva Lounsbury

## Tuesday, December 8, 2015

My grandfather passed away about twenty years ago. Several years prior to this, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease and Alzheimer's Dementia. As I watched his health decline with increased shaking and hallucinations, I became fearful and uncertain where this disease would take him. I had never been close to someone with symptoms like these. The hallucinations would make grandpa scared and fearful, and he worried about his family being in danger.

I watched as others tried to convince him the events he saw weren't real. He told me one day that nobody believed him and they all thought he was crazy. I became very frustrated at how very unfair this illness was, and how it was affecting all of us. After all, he was the perfect grandpa! He was a big man with a big heart and a gentle spirit who never lost his temper; at least this grandson never saw it. I thought he deserved to be healed and have this burden lifted from him but it was evident that his healing was going to come another way.

I began to pray that God would show me how to deal with grandpa. Over time God gave me an incredible peace with the situation and showed me that my grandpa was still the same wonderful, Christ-like man he had always been, except his thought processes were different now. God showed me how to converse with grandpa during his hallucinations in such a way that didn't belittle him or make him wonder if he was crazy. As God granted me peace, the time I had left with my grandpa was wonderful. The same peace is available to all of us in every difficulty we face. Seek His peace today!

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:4-9)

Dean Bass

# Wednesday, December 9, 2015

“...In Me, you may have peace.” John 16:33

My Father was a very troubled man. Growing up with an angry and abusive mother, Dad ran away from home as a young teen. He worked as a crew hand on the river boats that plied the Mississippi during the 1920's. He learned to be rough and tough and took up all the vices rough, tough men were expected to have. And he had no peace.

As a husband and father, Dad struggled with the addictive effects of alcohol and nicotine. He was often unfaithful to my mother. Our occasional good times were always blotted out by his incessant bouts of anger, depression, resentment, and abuse. We had no earthly peace.

He finally left us when I was sixteen years old. During the next six years we were to meet only once and correspond only two times. I remained fearful of him. I learned from relatives that he was his old self. He still had no peace.

At the end of those six years a miracle happened to me – the birth of my first son. My Dad heard about it and called, quietly asking if he could come for a visit – he very much wanted to see his new grandson.

I found him a totally different person. Dad held my son and cried with joy - I'd never seen him cry before. He told me he had quit smoking and drinking. He no longer swore and cursed. He had apologized to my Mom and asked her forgiveness. He told me he loved me - words he had never spoken to me before.

He also said he'd returned to the Jesus of his childhood. I was astounded! I'd never heard him use the name Jesus except as a swear word. I also discovered that months earlier, when he'd heard he was going to be a grandfather; he'd promised God that he would always be a good example to his grandchild. And he always was.

So, the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of my son's forthcoming birth triggered in his memory the love he knew Jesus had always had for him. God had answered my prayers. Dad lived for only three more years – long enough to hear his grandson tell him “...I love you Granddad.” He had, in those short three years, the peace he had been searching for his entire life. God's peace.

“You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in You,  
all whose thoughts are fixed on You!”

Isaiah 26:3

Jim Cunningham



# Thursday, December 10, 2015

Luke 2:8-20

Throughout my life there has always been a fascination with snow. My memories as a kid were sitting in my house with the snow falling and the fireplace going, just taking in the winter season. Our home growing up had these large windows that overlooked the city of Marysville from up on the hill. I just loved how the snow would blanket everything with a beautiful white uniform look. When we were lucky enough to receive a good snowfall overnight I would sneak out of my room and head downstairs to the back porch. I would open the sliding glass window, stick my hand out to catch some snowflakes, and take in the crisp, cool winter air. The calmness in our neighborhood and the city was always something so amazing to take in. The untouched snow on the streets and the glistening of streetlights brought a tranquil beauty to a world that always seems to struggle with finding it.

When I think about the Nativity story I am sure it was far from peaceful when it came to the night Christ was born. A cave surrounded by barn animals, a mother giving birth, and a newborn son coming into the world just doesn't come across as peaceful in my mind. Yet, something changed that night in Bethlehem. Hearts were warmed, and a sense of peace came over God's people that could only come from the Savior. As the angels tell the shepherds of Christ being born I can only imagine how their hearts were filled with a calmness that could only come from God. Then to be reassured of His love as they encountered Christ in the manger that night. I am sure it was a moment in their lives where everything stopped and they truly found peace.

To this day, I still will open up the door and take in the snow, the crisp winter air, and the peace that comes with it. I love the feeling and how it takes me back to my days as a kid. It is those memories I go to, to seek peace in my devotion time with Him. I would encourage you to try and do the same. Find some moments today, search for a peaceful place, and allow Christ some time to bring tranquility into your life. It might be just the thing you need in this season of the year.

Pastor James Lounsberry

# Friday, December 11, 2015

If I look through my experiences, and examine the times I truly felt peace in my life, one particular instance comes straight to the forefront of my mind. It was my seventh grade year, at a time my family was struggling for money, trying to make ends meet month to month. This was something my parents tried to hide from my brother and me, but stress relating to money seemingly bled from their pores. It was no secret that we needed help financially, and it was an issue I was not shy in bringing to God's attention. One particular night, I was buried deep in a homework assignment, and up to my neck in an argument with God. I recall being angry, frustrated, and altogether stressed out about our current circumstances. Peace was certainly nowhere to be found.

It was in the midst of this temperamental mood that the doorbell rang; drawing me from my room to investigate. As I began to peek around the corner towards the door I found my parents picking up a blank, plain, white envelope. As they opened it, the contents were revealed. Inside this small package was a clump of money and a small slip of paper. Written on the paper was one thing - Matthew 6:25-34.

As I returned to my room, evidently less angry with God as I thanked Him for this amazing gift; I went to my Bible and read the verses. As the words began to sink into my brain, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace and security. It felt as if God was whispering in my ear directly, "I will take care of your needs and your family; you need only to follow Me."

It is in the midst of our everyday, crazy lives God truly works to give us this overwhelming sense of peace. In today's world we are so caught up in the idea that we have to be secure in a job, a relationship, money, a church – that we often forget that the only thing we need to be secure in is Jesus. God promises that He has a plan to prosper us; we must only seek His kingdom and trust Him. So this week, as we all wait for a feeling of PEACE to wash over us and fill our lives, let us not forget to seek Him first.

Kelsey Hedrick

# Saturday, December 12, 2015

“I’m leaving you at peace. I’m giving you my own peace.  
I’m not giving it to you as the world gives  
so don’t let your hearts be troubled, and don’t be afraid.”  
John 14:27

Peace came to me at a time when I needed it most. I was a young mother with four children under the age of six. I wasn’t working outside the home and my husband was working on my father’s small farm. We had very little money and few resources. We lived in a small house that was bursting at the seams. I was anxious, deeply depressed and I wondered how we were going to make it financially, and quite frankly physically and emotionally.

One day when I thought that I could no longer go on feeling this way any more, I fell down on my knees and cried out to God for help. He reminded me of His promise to rest in Him because He would take care of everything, I need only accept my circumstances and put my trust and hope in Him. A peace poured over me and filled me with hope. That hope changed me and I looked at things differently, thanking God for our family and house full of love. I learned that peace does not come from circumstances but from our Lord. I look back on those times now and I realize those days were some of the best of my life. Raising my children and working hard to make a good life for us has shaped me into who I am today. My children have come back to tell me that they are happy we didn’t have all the material things; they had to work hard to get what they wanted. They say that this has made them who they are today...capable, loving and responsible adults.

Peggy Urlacher



JOY



# Sunday, December 13, 2015

Psalm 127; Zephaniah 3:16-17

“Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.  
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one’s youth.  
Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them.”

Psalm 127:3-5, nrsv

Shelly and I had no idea how quiver-full we’d be when we got married, but along with our three boys came many happy times! Times like my one-year-old first born son and me laughing hysterically when he, for the first time, did to his mom what I’d been secretly teaching him to do whenever I fed him baby food peas: spit them out on her! Or like the sound of our first and second sons giggling together from their bedroom at night after our second had been moved to a “big boy bed” in his brother’s room. Times like the sound of two older brothers laughingly picking on their baby brother – and baby bro laughing at the joy of being the object of his brothers’ attention (and later, the different kind of laughter when he got them back). I’m looking forward to hearing their laughter when they all plan to be home this Christmas.

That word “happy” in Psalm 127:5 can be translated “blessed,” “joyful,” and even “jubilant.” That has been true for us (it’s important to note that the original language that is translated “sons” can just as easily be “children,” so it’s not tied to a gender). I think of the joy the Father had when He heard Jesus, the baby, laugh for the first time. I think of the joy the Father has when He thinks of us:

“He will take great delight in you;  
in His love He will no longer rebuke you,  
but will rejoice over you with singing.”  
Zephaniah 3:17, niv

Pastor Mike

# Monday, December 14, 2015

Every Christmas, children and families of our church go to a few of the nursing homes in Yakima to sing Christmas carols. This year we are going on Wednesday, December 16, if you want to join us. After we sing some carols we visit with the residents, learn their names, get to know them a little bit, and give them candy canes. One of the best parts about singing is inviting everyone else to sing with us. The louder they are, the less I can hear myself sing, which is always a good thing. Last year Alyssa and I took Judah and Jordan with us. Judah tried singing a few songs, but my favorite part of the night was watching him tell others, "Merry Christmas!" Instead of saying "hello" and "goodbye" to others, he said, "Merry Christmas!" over and over again all night. Most of the adults were shocked he was even talking to them. I saw the adults' faces light up as Judah acknowledged them, smiled at them and/or gave them a candy cane.

Parents' faces light up when they see their children. Joseph and Mary's faces no doubt lit up that night long ago as Jesus lay in a manger. Jesus would be the true source of joy in not just their lives, but in the lives of everyone in the entire world. This kind of joy is not limited to just December, but can be with us all year. God's love for us never leaves, nor does the joy that He brings into our lives. Does thinking about Jesus make you want to sing (even if you aren't a good singer, like me)? Does thinking about Jesus get your face to light up?

"Shout to the Lord, all the earth; break out in praise and sing for joy!"

Psalm 98:4

Pastor Casey Wilkerson



# Tuesday, December 15, 2015

John 3:28-30; John 15:9-17; Philippians 2:1-11

Joy is not circumstantial. Joy, as described by Jesus and John the Baptist is more consistent with a state of being. Neither Jesus nor John described joy as limited to being “happy” although happiness is a wonderful aspect of joy. Both Jesus and John talked about joy becoming complete. Paul describes this as well in Philippians 2.

Perhaps we can catch a glimpse of this state of joy and its “completion” as we watch our young children, grandchildren and great grandchildren become increasingly more eager and excited as Christmas approaches. They display an expectant hope of something wonderful looking toward its completion when gifts can finally be opened.

John the Baptist in John 3 describes this spiritual reality in just such an expectant manner. We look to Christmas as the fulfillment of God’s promise of a Savior. Joy to the world indeed! But our joy could only become complete when our Savior, Jesus Christ, conquered death on the cross and through His resurrection completed the reconciliation with God that His birth alone would not fulfill.

“You yourselves can testify that I said,  
‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’

The bride belongs to the bridegroom.

The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him,  
and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice.

That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

He must become greater; I must become less.”

John 3:28-30

In John 15 Jesus tells us how we can remain in His love and how our joy can be complete. We need to be demonstrators of Christ’s attitude through selfless acts of love and humility.

This wonderful time of Christmas should remind us that our Savior’s joy is complete when He sees His friends being Jesus throughout this holiday season and the New Year which follows.

Merry Christmas and a completely Joy-filled New Year.

Scott Williams

# Wednesday, December 16, 2015

The time was winter 2014. The place was the summit of White Pass. Rachael and I decided to take Riley (4) and Brinley (8 months) up into the woods to find and bring home our first “real” family Christmas tree. The goal was to start a tradition that we could repeat each year as a family for years to come. The excitement on a scale of 1-10 was a solid 12. Riley and I set out into the forest as Rachael hung back in the vehicle to feed Brinley. Riley probably located over 20 trees that were “the one”. He would run through the snow up to a tree and ask, “Dad, dad, is this the one!?!? Oh yeah, this is the one!!!” I would explain, “No, this one can’t be the one because it is 15 feet tall and we only have 9 foot ceilings...” I would then locate one that had potential, but still wasn’t quite what I had in mind. It turns out that in the forest they don’t grow like you see at the makeshift parking lot tree stands that are full of farm grown perfectly full Christmas Trees that are arranged in various heights. In the forest most look like the Charlie Brown Christmas Tree. Nevertheless, Riley and I were having a blast! Just being in the mountains in the fresh cool air and getting to play in the snow, me with him and him with me, was pure Joy. Joy that I received from my boy and he received from me, his father.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him,  
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 15:13

Steven J. Stilley





# Thursday, December 17, 2015

The word family doesn't always make you think of the happiest things. You love them to death, but family always knows how to hit that one bad nerve. Whether it's a bad tone of voice when someone asks you to do the dishes, or your wife had a bad day at work and is in a bad mood so everything you say upsets her, or your sister wore your dress without asking, family just gets on your nerves. However, like me you can probably think of a time like this: my family and I were sitting in a hotel room eating low quality pizza and just laughing at each other's bad jokes. We didn't really know why everything was so funny; we just knew that we were together and that we were happy. We had a joy in our hearts.

Sometimes the things that can bring us the most frustration are also the things that bring us the most joy. God gives us joy in many different ways every day, we just have to be open to seeing the things that are meant to bring us that joy. Sometimes it's family, or friends, or just the knowledge that we have a God who loves us. Sometimes it's something big, but sometimes the little things we take for granted are the things that God sends our way. Either way, God always gives us some reason to be joyous. So look for the little things. They are always there.

Julissa Peart



# Friday, December 18, 2015

## So Much Joy

“...for the Joy of the Lord is your strength.”  
Nehemiah 8:10

Stress! Oncology nursing at the hospital was transitioning to computers and I was not computerized! Our little grandson, Peter, had been diagnosed with Autism and his parents needed time to prepare for his mom to stay home. I was juggling my hours at work, trying to help out, and my “solid as a rock” husband, on whom I depend, was frequently out of town. Early morning prayers had become brief cries for help, “Just get us through this day, Lord”, no time to listen or look to His Word for answers.

After realizing that Peter could no longer stay in daycare, his mom called. She'd been crying. “Have you thought about retiring?” I was sure thinking about it now! “I'll call you back.” I bowed my head, “Dear Lord, forgive me for not listening earlier. I'm listening now. Help me.” I truly felt the weight of Peter vs. Career balancing like a scale in my hands. God put the balance of His favor on Peter, and the weight of this decision fell off my shoulders. Joy and peace flooded my soul. Amazing! Thank you, Lord!

We had three unforgettable, joy-filled years together. That first year was very difficult, especially for Peter. But joy isn't about being easy. It's intentional on our part, lasting, and God-sent. Those difficult days became fewer and fewer and were replaced with many days of laughter and contentment.

Today, well, Peter is an eleven-year-old joy-spreader. In fact, he can be heard making a joyful noise most any day, most anywhere.

Whatever our future holds, we have joy everlasting because of Jesus...Joy unspeakable and full of His Glory.

Ruth Nordstrom

# Saturday, December 19, 2015

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,  
whenever you face trials of many kinds,  
because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”  
James 1:2-3

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him,  
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”  
Romans 15:13

“Everyone enjoys a fitting reply;  
it is wonderful to say the right thing at the right time!”  
Proverbs 15:23

Will you allow God to use you and be the joy to someone else?

I encountered some extreme challenges in my professional career as our company's General Manager this past year. Experiencing incidents where one long-term colleague committed suicide and another embezzled funds made it extremely difficult to “consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.” It was yet another reminder on how important it is to maintain a relationship with our trustworthy Christ.

The ripple effect throughout our organization was felt hard, but opportunities to discuss taboo subjects with everlasting spiritual consequences became common place. God has placed several individuals in my path, allowed fantastic conversations and mentorship opportunities to transpire. To be honest, I reluctantly participated in these opportunities initially, but have found complete joy as new relationships blossom. The joy of Christ has been my strength.

David Dunham



LOVE



# Sunday, December 20, 2015

In October of 2014 I was involved in a pretty serious car accident that left me with what's called a "traumatic brain injury" (TBI). I still have some lingering effects that may or may not go away, such as fatigue and some short-term memory issues. There is a difference, though, between my brain and my heart. I recently quoted Scripture to someone who was aware of my injury, and they asked, "How can you remember those verses?" My immediate Spirit-led response was, "Scripture comes from a different place than my brain." My heart recalls well, and it often reminds my brain.

As a part of my ongoing therapy, Shelly and I attend a support group for people/couples who have or had TBI. These are wonderful people who all share a common experience and are learning to work through it. The first time there, I listened to their stories. Some are now divorced because their spouses couldn't handle the struggle and the change in their lives. Hearing their stories, I realized that I had taken for granted that Shelly would walk with me through this; it never occurred to me that she wouldn't take this difficult journey with me. She has been the epitome of love and faithfulness to me, even though the changes have been hard at times - likely more difficult on her than I even know. This is an example of God's love to us!

Regardless of TBI, my heart has no difficulty calling to mind God's love for me:

"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:  
Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,  
for His compassions never fail.  
They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."  
Lamentations 3:21-23, niv

No matter what you are going through, let your heart call to mind God's great love for you.

Pastor Mike

# Monday, December 21, 2015

## The Father's Love

From the beginning, I grew up in a non-Christian home where my brothers and I were taught about Buddhism which was my mother's religion. Although I didn't know anything about Christianity, when I found myself alone in the woods after running away one night, I prayed for help, not knowing if anyone would hear. This wouldn't be the only time, as I ran away from home often. Years later, when I had hit rock bottom as an alcoholic, I began to learn about God through attending AA meetings.

As I was growing in my walk in faith, learning about my Father's love continued.

Having a child was one of my greatest joys. It wasn't until going through a very difficult divorce, and child custody that my faith was going to be tested. I didn't realize at that time what I was about to go through, loving my daughter.

The fight was on, court date after court date, lawyer after lawyer, losing everything I worked for. I learned that almost always custody usually goes to the mother. This battle lasted four years. To this day what my daughter had to go through still upsets me. I did get temporary custody, for about a year. The situation had gotten so bad for my daughter and I that I decided to give her back, so the insanity would stop. This was the toughest decision I had to make.

Reaching out to my Father in heaven in tears, praying on my knees, I was a broken man. My spirit was robbed of all hope, joy, and peace. I felt I couldn't do this anymore, I wanted to run away. Then one night I had a dream. My Father in heaven was telling me to be patient, your daughter needs you. I told Him I can't, I have nothing left; He told me, I will fight for you. I woke up strong and renewed. The next few court dates things started to change miraculously, and I was granted full custody of my daughter.

I cannot praise my Father in heaven enough, especially for the verse John 3:16. His love for His children is so strong, that He gave His only Son for us.

Thank you Father.

Nick Nichols

# Tuesday, December 22, 2015

Ups and downs. Highs and lows. The best of times and the worst of times. Our lives are full of them. During the low times, we cry out for God - we need Him and we know it! With God's help we rise to the occasion and can experience a natural high. However, it's during these times that we should not forget what got us there – the power and love of God. If we forget about how God's love got us through the rough times, we may find ourselves trying to do things on our own. "I got this." "This isn't anything I can't handle."

As we read through the Old Testament, we see God's chosen people journey through the highs and the lows over and over again. It is at times, frustrating. "Ok, Israel, when will you remember all that God has done for you?" "Why do you forsake Him?" "Why do you worship other gods?" If I were God, I would have washed my hands of this chosen people and chosen another! However, it is a good thing for you and me (and the Israelites) that I am not. God disciplines His children for their disobedience and betrayal, but then He reaches out to them in love! Despite their selfish actions, God tells His children that He loves them and has a plan for them.

During this week of Advent, we recognize God's love for us in the fact that He would give His son as a ransom for our mistrust and betrayal (John 3:16). We remember that God reaches out to His creation in love. Perfect love. A love that is patient and kind; a love that does not envy or boast; a love that is not arrogant or rude; a love that rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never ends. (1 Corinthians 13)

As you journey through the holiday season, with all of its hustle and bustle, take time and remember God's love for you. The love that took the form of an innocent, little baby who would change our lives forever. Remember that God's love for you is not for the moment, but is without end! Walk with Him and learn from Him as you climb the mountain tops together, so that you will learn to trust in Him and His love for you.

Pastor Jason Worthington

# Wednesday, December 23, 2015

## Love Can Make You Rich

Imagine that no matter what happens in your everyday life, you can go home where someone who loves you is waiting to care for you and make you feel welcome; someone who has been thinking of how to make you feel secure and cared for. She will do everything she can to make your home a place of comfort and refuge. She is ready and willing to provide the encouragement and ease of strain you need.

How much more is the realization that no matter where you go, the great God of the universe is caring for you and providing for you in the same way with even greater love and resources!

“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth  
to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.”  
2 Chronicles 16:9

And think how you feel when your granddaughter pauses a moment in her busy teenage life and tells you that she “loves you” then has to hurry on.

I am rich! Money and possessions have nothing to do with it. IT IS LOVE!

Norm Koenig





# Thursday, December 24, 2015

It's hard to believe that it's that time of year again. How does the time go so quickly? Christmas is right around the corner. But what is the real meaning of Christmas? Is it the gifts under the tree, the lights on the house, the cards in the mail, family dinners, snow in the yard, stockings hanging in the living room? Perhaps it is wishing your friends and co-workers a "Merry Christmas!" Is this really Christmas? For our family it is one of the most joyous Christian holidays, a time to remember the birth of Christ our Savior. Christmas is a time to share our blessings with one another, and to be surrounded by the people we love. It is a time for giving, and more importantly, it is a reminder of how much God loves us.

For me this year, Christmas is a time of reflection. It's a time to remember how much God loves our family to have protected us, strengthened us, and loved us through some difficult times. It will be a time of continued healing and renewed strength. This Christmas will also be a season of great joy. Who would have ever thought we would have a daughter in the O'Neill family! We are absolutely thrilled to have Sean's wife, Jen, in our family and we love her so much. Christmas is a time of God showing His great love for us. Christmas is when we celebrate the birth of the Christ child. God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to be born, and His birth brought great joy to the world. Shepherds, wise men, and angels all shared in the excitement of knowing about this great event. They knew this was no ordinary baby, as the prophets had told of His coming hundreds of years before. And on that blessed evening the star stopped over Bethlehem just to mark the way for those who were looking for this special child. I invite you to read and reflect on God's love as you read Luke 2: 1-21.

Look at Christmas in a new way this year. Reflect on the love of Jesus and invite Him into your heart. You will then experience the love of Christmas and come to know the true reason we rejoice in this season... Christ!

Shelly O'Neill



# Friday, December 25, 2015

Birthdays always make people feel celebrated and special – the center of the attention. Although they can be (and often are) celebrated alone, they are always much more fun when celebrated with family and friends. You've arrived at today's reading after 26 days of family moments; we have all shared the readings together of family stories and lessons – all part of your spiritual family tree.

Now we've arrived at the day to celebrate the birthday of the One who has made us all family. Whether you are reading this alone or with your family and friends, this birthday celebration is the largest gathering on record because you are celebrating with thousands of believers in Jesus who are gathered around His throne in heaven (Revelation 7) – all the saints who have gone before us, and at the same time you are celebrating with believers all around the world, including your West Valley Church family, who are also gathering and reading this today. This is a significant birthday!

Yet the One whom we celebrate today – the center of attention – has turned His attention to this world - to the hurting, and grieving, to the sinner, to the confused, and sick, and lonely. And He has turned His attention to *you*. He celebrates *you*. It is, to Him, as if this is your birthday. And in a way, it is:

*“Jesus replied, ‘With all the earnestness I possess I tell you this: Unless you are born again, you can never get into the Kingdom of God.’ ‘Born again!’ exclaimed Nicodemus. ‘What do you mean? How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?’ Jesus replied, ‘What I am telling you so earnestly is this: Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Men can only reproduce human life, but the Holy Spirit gives new life from heaven; so don’t be surprised at my statement that you must be born again!’ ‘... God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son so that anyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it. There is no eternal doom awaiting those who trust Him to save them.’” (John 3:3-7, 16-18, tlb)*

Celebrate Jesus' birthday today. I pray you will also celebrate your born-again birthday. And remember that you have come to this day with an enormous spiritual family tree to celebrate with!

Pastor Mike

Merry  
Christmas





**west valley church**

love.learn.live.

**7109 W Nob Hill Blvd  
Yakima, WA 98908**

**509-966-1550**

**[westvalleychurch.com](http://westvalleychurch.com)**