

## THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT: JOY

### “Joy, in the midst of it all”

This week, I reached my breaking point.

It's one of those days when we have no one to tell our troubles to because the focus is on the major troubles that affect our society at large. The personal struggles that continue to stay personal, with no one to tell it to, but God. We stay silently weeping and noiselessly screaming for help from God because we are convinced we might not make it to the next day.

We believe God has abandoned us on the cross of life and like Jesus, we look up and ask why He has chosen to forsake us.

For two years now, I've been trying to figure out what to think about the feedbacks I keep getting from one of my professors. I refused to believe that what I was experiencing was the truth telling itself, even if everything else combined to make me see it.

You see, I recently changed graduate schools and as a Black woman from an African country, I knew I was going to encounter problems but I also believed they would be manageable. They are not.

I broke down, wept and wished I could go back home to the comforts of what was familiar. I wished that someone would just listen to me and hear all the things I could not even put into words. I wished that I could just hear loved ones whisper the words, “It's going to be okay, we are here for you.”

I wept more as my soul became tired for being strong for too long and I could no longer find the strength to hold myself up. I sank deeper into sorrow because I am so far away from home, family, and help. Everyone else has their own battles they are dealing with and it looked as if hope could not be found for tomorrow.

Isaiah and Zephaniah prophesied in response to the corruption and injustices in Judah but they also offered hope for the future to the remnants who survived the exile of the Northern kingdom. As the people of Judah looked back on the actions of the people and the monarchies of the North, they concluded that what had happened to the ten tribes that had been taken into exile was their disobedience to God by worshipping other gods and desiring a king apart from God alone.

In order to find comfort and reassurance that the same fate would not befall them, Zephaniah ministered to the worried and tired souls of the people of Judah, reminding them that God would never leave them or forsake them in their troubles.

We can also take comfort and consolation in the words of Zephaniah as we take refuge and confidently trust in the name of the Lord (3:12) so that we can fully shout for joy and in triumph for we have won this battle from the enemy that stands too close and wishes to drag us down (3:14). We hold on to the faithfulness of God, knowing that even when he does not show up evidently at our side on the cross, He has planned a resurrection.

Jesus was tested and tried several times but he always had the word of God as security that he would not be abandoned. We sing the same song of faith, knowing our joy will be realized when we stop looking down at how far we've fallen or within to evaluate how we have failed ourselves and others who believe in us. Rather, we will look high up to the hills, away from our never-ending struggles, at the cross where the light of God's salvation draws us in.

Our help will come from the Lord who made the great heavens and the earth, who revives our tired souls and fills them with everlasting joy that is indescribable. We will welcome God's glory into our hearts so that we can properly rejoice and continue to remain in high spirits, in the face of the enemy that seeks to take away our joy.

Do we know how God will make this happen? Do we know what to do with what has already happened? Not at all. However, we know God has a reputation for showing up and rescuing us out of knotty, indecipherable situations, leaving us with nothing but gratitude and joyful praise on the inside. Therefore, we are taking a conscious effort to get up from the dump that now feels like home and look out to see the victory that the Lord has brought to pass on our behalf.

For the King of Israel, the Lord Himself is with us and we will no longer fear any disaster. Our hands will be raised in worship for the battle is the Lord's and victory comes from Him and Him alone. We will not just "hang in there," we will dance and sing songs of victory and reassurance, for the mercies and grace of God shows up daily in our lives, a new form of kindness and gift from God every morning.

As we wrestle with our pain, struggles and unanswered prayers, sisters and brothers, I hope that we rest in the knowledge of God being with us. Our own Emmanuel who was sent specifically to us. His coming multiplies us and increases our joy and all who come before him rejoice like the celebration at a harvest. A warrior who comes through, takes our yoke and the burdens we've had to bear for so long away and forever. A warrior whose joy over us is contagious and makes us want to dance and shout and praise until our voice is hoarse, for the banner he places over us is nothing but his undying love.

In the midst of our battles, God becomes our warrior, refuge, hiding place, nourishment, keeper, and healer. Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should take it to the Lord in Prayer! We are not losing our Joy for anything! For in his arms He'll take and shield us and because He is faithful, we will find solace, strength and joy there.

**Scripture:** Zephaniah 3:14-20

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**Brief Introduction:** "A native of Osun from Nigeria, Olubunmi Adegbola is a second-year graduate student working toward a Master of Theological Studies degree at Vanderbilt Divinity School."