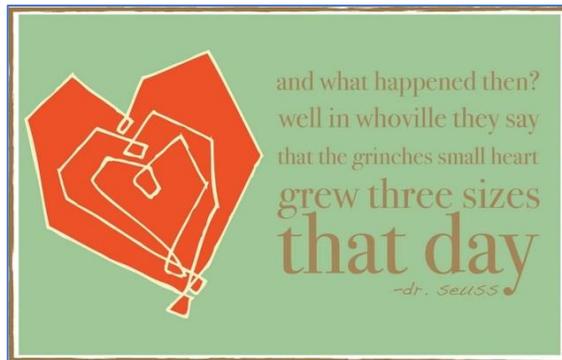




“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Romans 15:13

I always enjoy seeing the Christmas decorations when I am out and about on my daily walk and one I saw recently really put a smile on my face. It was cut out of the Grinch and his dog, Max. Dr. Seuss's story, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, is one of my all time favorites. Yes I enjoy Mr. Geisel's word wizardry, yes, I smile at the wry humor they instilled in the animation, but my biggest reason for loving this story is the line, "Well...in Whoville they say, that the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day!"



That's how my heart feels at Christmas. When I think about God sending his beloved Son to live amongst us and to then die for our sins, my heart fills with such joy it sometimes feels like it is growing three sizes as well. In the Bible verse above, Paul is praying that the believers in Rome will, through their belief in God and the power of the Holy Spirit, feel this same thing and abound in joy, peace and hope. So how can all of us experience this abundance?

This overflowing feeling of joy and peace comes not from external things or circumstances, but rather through our relationship with God. Just like the Grinch, we can become bitter and angry when we let the noise of our cares and concerns take over our minds. When that happens, we need to invite God into our hearts, to spend time with the Word, to have faith in the promise of eternal life and to remember God's great love for each of us. Trust that God understands and shares our struggles, our fears and our concerns.

Yes, our feeling of joy and peace will wax and wane over time, but the more often we spend time with God, the stronger this relationship will become. Spend some time with God this week and ask yourself:

- What makes your heart swell with joy and love?
- What difficult circumstances are you currently facing? How can your trust in God help you find peace and hope?
- Read the Christmas story from Luke and let your heart feel the great joy, peace and assurance of knowing that God sent the beloved Son into the world so we could enjoy eternal life.



Dear Lord, show me the empty places in my heart and the ways I try to fill them. Then lead me back to You and show me how I can position my heart to be filled and fulfilled by Your promises and the power of Your love. Your love is infinite and eternal. Let my heart abound in joy, peace and hope and let me share that feeling with others.

In Jesus' name, Amen.



The
Night Before
ADVENT



’Twas the night before Advent when all through God’s House
not a heart wasn’t stirring, not a heart wasn’t roused.
His people wrapped around His Word with awe,
Awaiting wonders and the fresh grace of God.

The children were anxious for His Story to start,
these Visions of love dancing loud in their hearts.
And God in His glory, and us, in Jesus Christ,
settled only for a Christmas all about Christ.

When out on the streets, the frenzy came with a clatter,
Yet in hearts, Joy sprang up, centred on Who matters.
Away from the stresses, we flew like a prayer,
Simply opened our hands and made room to prepare.

For the Light of the World to warm every dark space,
a lustre of hope cupped in every cold place.
Till what to our wandering hearts should appear,
Murmurings of a King and Love drawing near.

In a Book of Old Pages, so Living and True,
you can hear Jesus whisper, I’m coming for You.
Through Every Story, The King fiercely came,
And He beckons you, woos you, and calls you by name!

“Come Beloved! Come Chosen! Come Special Child!
Come Wanted! Come Nearer! Come Feel the King’s Smile!”
From Creation’s first star to manger’s bright light,
Unwrap His Love Story till He holds you one night.

He spoke all Love’s Word, then became Word in the Skin
And filled every heart that would welcome Him in.
And laying Himself down into manger’s straw,
He’s Your Immanuel, With Us is God.

Advent unwraps wonder, the greatest gift ever dreamed,
so come adore Him, the One who redeemed
all the willing and wanting with this Advent Awe
a sacred, slow Unwrapping of a season of God.

#TheGreatestGift
#UnwrappingTheGreatestGift

~*~

HOPE ★ LOVE ★ JOY

HOPE happens in times of waiting, which is what the Advent season is about: waiting on Jesus. Most people don’t like the idea of waiting. Today, as you have to wait for something (waiting in line, waiting for dinner to cook, waiting for your turn while playing a game, etc.) remember that good things are worth the wait. Thank God for the HOPE we have in Jesus.

HOPE ★ LOVE ★ JOY

Make a list of all the people in your life that you love. Thank God for the ways you see God’s love in each of them.

HOPE ★ LOVE ★ JOY

Joy spreads when you smile! Take a piece of ribbon or string and cut it to match the width of your smile. Measure with a ruler to determine the size of your smile. Try to smile at 10 people (or more!) tomorrow.

HOPE ★ LOVE ★ JOY

List the little things you look forward to and appreciate each day (i.e. morning cup of coffee, play time, family dinner). Thank God for the HOPE that can be found in looking forward to these simple pleasures.

HOPE ★ LOVE ★ JOY

Leave a candy bar in the mailbox for your mail carrier to find. Chocolate brings joy, right?