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¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. ²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Today is the 3rd Sunday and Advent, traditionally Joy Sunday, also called **Gaudete Sunday** (gow-DET-eh). Joy is an inner disposition, not dependent on external circumstances but often triggered by things outside of us. That is, we can feel joy when outside events feel dismal. It is a condition of our soul. As the Bible school song goes, "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart. Down in my heart to stay." And yet, from our hearts, this joy often bursts forth from our soul with a praise God. Or maybe it comes with a prayer of thanksgiving to God, a feeling of inner warmth, a tear of joy, a smile of contentment, or some other expression. How is it for you?

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Jesus wants us to have the fullness of Joy in our lives. (John 15:11) This joy can be present in good times or even in a pandemic and its accompanying personal demons: isolation, financial worries, health worries (our own and others), fretting about our families, worrying about our church and its future. There are social demons as well, such as political turmoil and racial injustice. These are but a few, and I imagine you could name others. But the point is, in times of deep trouble, we can have joy in our hearts.

In that spirit, Marlene and I chose Peter Mayer's *Sing Joy* as a song for our daughter's memorial service, and I think of her every time I hear it. It reminds me of the joyous gift she was to us. We even have blue bracelets that simply say, Sing Joy. The song is on the church Facebook page, and I have included a link in the printed text.

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We need joy in this pandemic. Many of us are reigning in our travels and celebrating at home, often not with our family. Almost every day, someone shares this sadness. Admittedly, in so many ways, this pandemic feels like it is eating us alive and sucking the life out of us. This is Christmas, a time for church and family, and many of us are missing both in very painful ways. We need some joy in these times.

But what does this have to do with John the Baptist? You know, as a minister, I can probably find a creative way to relate it all to John though it may require a fair bit of stretching. But that's one of a pastor's many talents. With that in mind, here goes.

John comes to point toward Jesus as the coming one who brings true light into the world. I think we need the joy of that light shining in our lives right now, welling up in our spirit and flowing outward. We need to be pointed; those things can move our spirit, especially in tough times as Psalm 30:5 says, "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning."

Now here is the connection. Like John, we need to point to those things that bring joy in our lives and help others. But there is a caveat: just because it brings us joy, it may not do the same for others. We can point, but we can also think with others listening to them as they explore what prompts joy in their lives. And let them tell us what might become moments of joy for us.

So, I want to share a few things that bring joy to my spirit; my list is not exhaustive, and I am sure I overlooked many things, but it is to spur our thinking about where we find joy. As you ponder the sources of joy in your life, you can share them on the Facebook stream if you wish. They occur in no particular order. And they may help others find joy.

Here are ten things:

1. Family. I think you know how vital my family is to me. They are a large part of my anchor in life. I enjoy the times I can spend with them. Many of you might see my face light up when I speak of them. Even simple things like social media or texting with my grandchildren help make my day. And Marlene, my rock who commutes between here and St. Louis, is my great support source. Indeed, since I have been here, we have not missed a day of talking on the phone when we have been apart.
2. Music. Harry Chapin sang in *Mr. Tanner*, "Music was his life. It was not his livelihood." Almost any time you come by my office, you will hear music. I am usually listening to two expanding playlists. One is called *Coastal*. This naturally contains a heavy dose of Jimmy Buffet music and a lot of music I heard on his Sirius XM channel *Radio Margaritaville*. Another Playlist is simply called *Bruce*. This is mostly comprised of Rock and Roll like Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Bruce Springsteen. In my devotions or reading time, the music will usually be music composed to enhance focus or Classical Music.
3. My office. I am so happy to have a place to go each day to focus on the church. It is a place I look forward to going to each day. I enjoy being there. It grounds me in my call as our pastor. I am the

pastor, and we are all part of the church with a mission to serve Christ. It reminds me that whether I am serving locally or in the broader church, it is all part of one calling to live into God's love. As I look around my office, there are bits of joy from various aspects of my life and family and different phases and ministry places.

4. Other Folks. Friends, neighbors, pastors are all sources of joy. This is one reason I so appreciate social media. It gives me the chance to keep in contact with so many people and find old friends. I treasure my colleagues in ministry both locally and beyond Olean. I treasure my friends who follow different religious traditions which are part of the Interfaith Community that remind us of the blessings that the quest conversation and understanding can be.

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9. As I look over this list, I am aware that it does not sound religious enough. Where is Jesus, where is God, where is prayer? As I said, it is not exhaustive.

Now let me turn a bit to the overtly religious. Part of it involves my daily routine. Those things that I listed mostly come from the first thing I do when I get to my office. I turn to my Panda Planner and list at least three things I am grateful for things that bring me joy in my life. Indeed, the things I have spoken of up to now can be found on those daily bits of thanksgiving. My time of gratitude is an overt prayer of thanksgiving. After that bit of thanksgiving, I turn to the Scripture to read one chapter from five or six different books.

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