

Sermon Title: **“In Joy: Self-Awareness”**

Bible: **John 1:6-8, 19-28**

When: on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, December 17, 2023

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

### **Opening Prayer**

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **1. John the Baptist Again?**

If you were at the last Sunday service, and if you remember last Sunday’s Scripture reading, you might wonder why it is about John the Baptist again. All four Gospels mention John the Baptist. Last Sunday, we read the Gospel of Mark, and I talked about Self-Denial and peace. Today’s scripture reading is from the Gospel of John, and my focus is John the Baptist’s self-awareness and joy. Unlike the Gospel of Mark, many people came to John the Baptist and asked, “Who are you?” again and again. “Who are you?” “Are you the Messiah?” “Are you Elijah?” “Are you the prophet?” John the Baptist answered, “No, I am not the Messiah” “No, I am not Elijah” “I am not the prophet.” But the people kept asking questions, “Who are you?” And John the Baptist answered with his confidence, “I am the voice of one crying out into the wilderness to make straight the way of the Lord.” He knew who he was and what he was doing. Self-denial is always difficult, because it might feel like you are losing everything or everyone. Self-awareness is also difficult, but it can give us joy when we know ourselves.

### **2. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

Thankfully I know what I want to be. I am so blessed and thankful to be a pastor. Even though I am paid, there is an absolute joy to serve you as your pastor. And thankfully, I know the one whom I love. I did not need to meet a million people. When I met the One, I knew that she was my better half. Fortunately, I still live together with my dear.

Have you heard of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs? Abraham Harold Maslow was a psychologist, creating the Hierarchy of Needs and expressing his theories in his book, "Motivation and Personality." According to his theory, what we need are physiological needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and safety needs such as security of body, employment, health, and love and belonging, such as friendship and family, and esteem needs, such as self-esteem, confidence, respect and recognition of others, and self-actualization needs, such as achievement of one's own full potential. These needs can be illustrated in the shape of a pyramid, a fixed sequence of progression. But many needs can be present in a person simultaneously, relatively, and differently.

For example, for John the Baptist, the basic needs might not be that important. He lived in the wilderness, ate locusts and wild honey, and did not care about what he wore. Even though he had many followers, he might have not had a need for love and belonging. As we know, many religious leaders were questioning him and were set against him. What he needed was self-actualization, at the top of the needs pyramid. His focus was to achieve his own full potential, or to meet his own purpose to make straight the way of the Lord. John the Baptist was such a great and somewhat strange person, right? I do not want to live like John the

Baptist, but I believe that there was joy in his life, as he knew his purpose and as he achieved his goal.

### **3. Self-Awareness**

Do you know yourself? What needs do you have? How do you meet those needs? For me, it is not easy to know myself. To know my basic needs is challenging. I really enjoy eating, but I am kind of a stress eater. When I get stressed, I tend to eat more than what I need.

Sometimes, I am looking for sweets, candies, chocolate, and ice cream. Perhaps I am thinking that eating more can meet my needs and relieve my stress. But even if I am full and stuffed, I am not satisfied. I am hyper, and maybe too much hyper, but there is no joy.

Occasionally, when I get too stressed, I do not eat. I do a kind of fasting, skipping one meal, two meals, and having no meals a day. Sometimes, this makes me pray to give up myself and open my hands to God. "I need you Lord, as I am your child." Then, nothing is in my stomach. But a little joy can be in my mind. I am a stress eater, but in the depth of myself, I recognize again that I am the child of God. Then, it gives me joy beyond my empty stomach and even beyond my situation.

### **4. In Joy: You Belong To God and Us!**

Our church sanctuary is decorated with beautiful poinsettias. There is a story or legend about Poinsettias. Once there was a poor Mexican girl named Pepita. On Christmas Eve, Pepita was sad because she had no present to give to Baby Jesus. Her cousin Pedro told her that even the smallest gift will make Jesus happy, if it is given by someone who loves Jesus.

On the way to the church, she picked a small handful of weeds and made them into a bouquet. This small bouquet of weeds might make Pepita embarrassed. Nevertheless, Pepita remembered what her cousin Pedro had told her. She laid her poor and smallest gift to the Baby Jesus at the bottom of the Nativity scene. Then, amazingly, the bouquet of weeds burst into bright red star-shaped flowers. It was a miracle. From that Christmas Eve forward, the bright red poinsettias were known as “Flowers of the Holy Night” or “Christmas Flowers.”

Even in this season of Advent and Christmas, you might feel blue. Some of our church members, friends, and family members passed away this year, and we miss them. Some of us are not feeling good. Perhaps some of us are not in good situations. What you bring here can be not only laughter, but tears; not happiness, but sadness; not confidence, but embarrassment; not gratitude, but complaints; not energy, but stress and weariness. These might look like weeds on the road. But you belong to God. You belong to us. God needs you and we need you. We might not be able to solve your problems. But your struggles are our struggles, and your suffering is our suffering. Your tears are our tears. Your prayers are our prayers. Please remember that you belong to God and to us. We are connected and we are the body of Jesus Christ together. We are all children of God!

### **Closing Prayer**

O Lord, when we are sad, please bring us together. When we struggle, please bring us together. When we suffer, please bring us together. We all belong to you. Come to us and reside in us with your joy! In Jesus’ name. Amen.