



WEEK THREE

A Reading from Biblical Wisdom: Isaiah 49:13

Sing for joy, O heavens! Rejoice, O earth! Burst into song, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on them in their suffering.

A Reading from Biblical Wisdom: Colossians 1:12

May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light.

Context for the Contemporary Wisdom

Biblical joy is different than what most people think of as joy. It is not just a happy emotion that we either feel or don't feel, it is a state of being that finds its source in God. The Bible is clear that joy comes from God. It joy, grounded in thankfulness for the first Advent of Jesus Christ and looking forward toward his second coming, that is a marker of faithful believers.

On the third Sunday of Advent, we light another candle, often pink as a symbol of Advent joy. Believers will read and reflect on scriptures from the Old and New Testaments about the joy of our salvation in Jesus Christ. The third Sunday of Advent is often referred to as Joyful Sunday.

When Tracey M. Lewis-Giggetts wrote an essay on Black joy for the *Washington Post*, she had no idea just how deeply it would resonate. But the outpouring of positive responses affirmed her own lived experience: that Black joy is not just a weapon of resistance, it is a tool for resilience. Her book *Black Joy: Stories of Resistance, Resilience, and Restoration* is a collection of lyrical essays about the way joy has evolved, even in the midst of trauma, in her own life. Detailing these instances of joy in the context of Black culture allows us to recognize the power of Black joy as a resource to draw upon, and to challenge the one-note narratives of Black life as solely comprised of trauma and hardship.

A Reading from Contemporary Wisdom

Excerpt from the *Washington Post* essay by Tracey M. Lewis-Giggetts: "My Daughter Reminded Me that Black Joy is a Form of Resistance" (June 19, 2020)

- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/06/19/my-daughters-dancing-rain-reminded-me-power-black-joy/> (Complete Article)
- <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjn6srBq7P7AhVJRTABHW8xCuoQtwJ6BAghEAI&url=https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/culture/video/tracey-michael-lewis-giggetts-celebrates-black-joy-book-82717775&usg=AOvVaw3N78s4pXbDYBEPMd5xcQfp> ("Good Morning America" interview with Tracey M. Lewis-Giggetts (February 07, 2022))

"...We laughed uncontrollably. Not a few chuckles like when we see a funny meme on the Internet. This was a guffaw. A scream-laugh. An unearthing of all the things, known and unknown, that ailed us.

"When we got back into the house, I cried. Mostly because I'd been vacillating between sorrow and rage the whole week prior, and I understood what that singular moment really meant. In my mind, we were two black girls in a backyard turning the world and white perceptions upside down with our joy.

"It was a cleansing experience for us and, in many ways, it was a demonstration of what Zora Neale Hurston once said: 'Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me.'

"Our dancing in the rain wasn't a denial of all the storms that had moved in on black people that week. It was a dare. An indignant stance of confidence in the midst of this malignant monsoon called systemic racism. Our laughter was a way to say 'you can't steal our joy' to anyone who'd dare deny our humanity. Author and scholar Imani Perry, in a recent article for the Atlantic, captured this feeling well: 'Joy is not found in the absence of pain and suffering. It exists through it. ... Blackness is an immense and defiant joy.'

“Joy as resistance isn’t as much of a stretch as some might think. We constantly hear about the alleged rioting and looting happening during recent protests and uprisings around the country. What we don’t hear too much about is the spontaneous breaks in protests when dancers and singers and artists take over where the chants and confrontations left off. The way the crowds stomp an insistent rhythm into the pavement feels like a Diasporic clarion call. The engagements and weddings that have happened in the middle of marches are too often considered anecdotal for some but are actually intentional acts of defiance. Why else would a woman dressed in ivory satin stand with her partner, eyes wide and full with liquid love, kissing fervently to the sounds of protesters’ cheers?

“Choosing to express our joy loudly and without reservation is directly connected to bringing our *Imago Dei* (made in the image of God) humanity front and center in the movement. That’s a necessary form of resistance because it clearly punches the lights out of the pervasive dehumanization we encounter every day.

“More than even resistance, though, dancing in the rain with my sweet girl illuminated just how powerful and healing black joy can be for black people. That night, my baby girl slept more soundly than she had in months. I was able to quiet the panic that fills my chest when, long after the little one’s bedtime, I sit at my computer and prepare to write another essay about another hashtagged brother or sister.

“In the wake of George Floyd calling out for his long-passed mother as his neck was being crushed by a police officer and what I imagine was Breonna Taylor’s last dream before she was shot while trying to sleep in her bed, it’s hard not to believe that the only real and lasting weapon I have as a black mother is to circumvent these generations-long traumas with generational joy.

“My daughter will laugh and cry and dance as much as she likes with as much freedom as I can afford her. She will know that she can laugh and cry and dance in the sun *and* the rain.

“And sure, I’m a mother. So after the laughter was over and both our hair and our hearts were drenched, I might have still said, “Girl, get your tail in this house and get

those soaked clothes off!" But this time, my words were laced with some newly recovered ammunition: joy."

Questions for Reflection

Tracey sees joy as a weapon. That is an unusual thought when we think about joy. Her thought is when we think of Black Joy with love, joy is the pathway and love is the answer. Black Joy is united by love. Regardless how bad the tragedy or situation, when we respond in love no one can steal your joy. She encourages everyone to be intentional about creating joy in their day. Joy is embodied and tells you what your body needs.

1. How can anyone experience joy when racial justice is not just for marginalized people?
2. Joy is easy to express when everything is going well in your life. Consider joy when life comes at you hard and heavy. How can you focus on joy and live a joyful life despite the challenges around you?
3. Listen to the song Joy by the Georgia Mass Choir.
(<https://music.apple.com/us/album/joy/350362129?i=350362163>) Can you feel the Joy the choir expresses as they sing from their souls? Why do you think the experience of Joy is so intense in this song?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come before you with joy in our hearts, minds, and souls. When it's hard to live a joyful life, as hard times and racial injustice plague our land, give us the strength to stand strong on your word. To stand on truth and justice and never let anyone steal our joy. May our joy resonate to our brothers and sisters in Christ and the world. In the name of Jesus, we pray Amen.