Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!

Rev’d Peter Balabanski

Advent 3 – Zeph 3 Isa 12 Phil 4 Luke 3

We’ve just heard Zephaniah preaching to a people who faced imminent disaster. Soon, their city would be destroyed and almost everyone carted off into slavery far away. Yet Zephaniah’s message is one of rejoicing; of rescue – particularly for the disabled and for refugees. Their day will come in God’s good providence. We also heard Paul write from prison to a community that was struggling with envy, rivalry and selfish ambition; yet his message is to rejoice! And I preach under the combined shadows of pandemic and ecological threat. Rejoice? Yes!

Today is Gaudete Sunday – Rejoicing Sunday. Advent 3 always has readings about rejoicing, and they’re always ambiguous, like today. We’re at the half-way mark in a season of penitence and preparation, and in its wisdom, the Church has decided that we need encouragement, not rebuke. And come to think of it, I doubt that we’d move forward well as a parish if I got up like John the Baptist this morning and called us all a brood of vipers.

No; our readings tell me to proclaim that God’s purpose is to rescue all who suffer. Zephaniah proclaims God’s preferential option for the disabled and the refugee. John the Baptist proclaims God’s advocacy for the hungry and naked, and for anyone who’s been cheated or bullied. And that is Good News for most of the world; that is the *Missio Dei* – God’s charge to us to work together in a movement that strives to end the dominance of greed – to end the culture of only looking after number one. The Good News on this Rejoicing Sunday is that

acts of kindness and love are inspired by God who came to dwell among us as the Christ-child; Christ who dwells within us and who’s coming again. Our kindness and compassion are signs that God is with us; God is within us and amongst us.

By God’s grace, our small acts of gentleness – a tiny gift of hope, a cheering song of joy have the power of the butterfly effect. We can unleash a transforming storm of joy and courage and hope through the grace and love of God working with our little offerings. What a difference God’s grace can make; what a cause for joy. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice! Amen.