

# Psalm 122

## Song of Praise and Prayer for Jerusalem

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

1

I was glad when they said to me,  
“Let us go to the house of the Lord!”

2

Our feet are standing  
within your gates, O Jerusalem.

3

Jerusalem—built as a city  
that is bound firmly together.

4

To it the tribes go up,  
the tribes of the Lord,  
as was decreed for Israel,  
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.

5

For there the thrones for judgment were set up,  
the thrones of the house of David.

6

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  
“May they prosper who love you.

7

Peace be within your walls,  
and security within your towers.”

8

For the sake of my relatives and friends  
I will say, “Peace be within you.”

9

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,  
I will seek your good.

This week, I was trying to understand joy.

It is our theme, after all, for this Advent journey we are embarking on, a radiant joy shining through the darkness. And today's aspect of joy - renegade joy - seems particularly poignant, in an age where joy can sometimes feel like a revolutionary act.

I went first to the prophets of old and of late... Isaiah and Barbara Brown Taylor, both of whom had much to say on the topic, about the importance of seeking light in the darkness, and the difficulty of finding it in times such as these. When hope is in short supply, seeking joy can feel questionable in the midst of mourning. And because of that, because we are called by God to be a joyful people, seeking it in such times ... becomes necessary. Life giving.

I then went to the internet, finding stories of miracles within loss, stories of mothers dancing at funerals due to gun violence, living into this need for renegade joy, to establish their presence and their life in a world where that presence is devalued at every turn.

I sought joy in the corners of fact and fiction, stopping briefly in Harry Potter, when Dumbledore says, "Happiness can be found in

the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light.” That’s pretty good. A light in the darkness sounds a lot like joy. I went looking for the language of renegade joy wherever I could find it. I looked. And I looked.

And then I realized it was Thanksgiving. And I had the greatest philosopher of renegade joy sitting across from me at the dinner table - my 1.5 year old nephew, Connor.

The first time I asked him what joy was, he was sitting on the kitchen floor and he grinned and held up his newly broken in red snow boot. But it was not just any snowboot. No, this snow boot had a red car painted on the foot. A snow boot with a red car painted on it is good for zooming through snowdrifts. And nothing says “renegade joy” like a toddler wearing his zooming boots zooming through snowdrifts. He’d just worn said boots for the first time whilst enjoying the kind of snowfall his home state of Oklahoma never sees. At first, the venture was a little scary, but then new things often are. We’d put him down in the snow and he’d lift up his feet and yell in protest, unwilling to leave the comfort of the known. But, steeled by the courage brought by red zooming snow boots, he persevered, eventually throwing snowballs, riding bravely on the blue plastic toboggan his grandma

found in the shed, and giggling when receiving enthusiastic kisses from a giant golden retriever.

And for a moment, I understood. Joy, it seems, requires bravery, to face the unknown, to encounter the world as it is. Joy can be found in red zooming snow boots.

But I wanted to know more, so again I asked him, CONNOR what is joy?!

He was sitting on his grandma's lap, and he looked at me and solemnly said, "COOKIE!" while holding up his 5th gingerbread man of the night.

About a year after my father died, my mother took up home renovation, and the first order of business was getting the kitchen she had always wanted, with the tall counters required by a family of tall people, and most importantly, a huge kitchen island for baking Christmas cookies the day after Thanksgiving. We stuck to sugar cookies and gingerbread men and trees this year, rolling and cutting the dough wearing our matching cookie baking t-shirts. Mom placed a picture of dad when he was in high school on the counter, and there is a definite resemblance there to the

grandson he never met. When Connor saw it the first time, he grabbed the photo and said, “Gampa.” We didn’t know he knew that word... but to be fair, the little philosopher knows lots of words we are not sure how he learned. As the day went on and the cookies piled up on the counter, they disappeared almost as quickly, when the toddler realized that a sweet smile and those big blue eyes that do indeed resemble his gampa, and with a questioning “cookie?” he could score as many cookies as he wanted from the ladies around him.

And for a moment... I understood. Joy, it seems, requires remembering. Holding those whom we’ve lost close to us as we carry forward into an unknown future. A kiss and a prayer sent on the wind to those we love and we miss, those saints gone before us who wish nothing but joy and cookies to the ones left behind.

But still, I wanted to know more, so I asked the toddler again - what is joy?

It was mid afternoon - naptime - and he squirmed out of my arms and tearfully pointed across the room, saying “ma-MA” before running to the woman in question, my sister, who scooped him up and took him to bed for a quick nap. (My nephew speaks in a

French accent, we're not sure why...). The day had been long, filled with strangers and puppies and too much sugar, and he really needed some rest to keep him going.

And for a moment... I understood. Joy, it seems, is found in a warm hug in the midst of hardship, given by someone you love. Connection. Companionship. Rest and safety in the midst of struggle. Watching the beloved big sister who mothered you a little bit along the way mother someone else. Joy is found in the comfort of people and community we are on the journey with.

The day went on, filled with joy and delight, and the light waned. I asked him one more time - Connor... what is joy?

He paused in his antics and did the patented sleepy toddler eye rub, and then toddled over to the newly decorated tree. Well, decorated except for the bottom most branches that had been stripped... or rather rearranged by the child in question. He pointed to the top of the tree and said, "TAR" and then continued to rearranged the ornaments on the tree.

And for a moment... I understood. Connor is right. Dumbledore was right. Hope can be found in a light in the darkness. For

where there is hope, there can be joy. And where there is joy, there can be hope. A star on the tree that takes 3 people and a step stool to attach. The farm light shining in the middle of nowhere, leading weary holiday travelers to their destination. In the midst of health struggle, glimpses of the elusive “better”. Moments of clarity in the middle of the darkness of depression and mental health struggle. Justice found for those who are wronged. Knowing that joy is present in this journey, even if the journey is long, especially if this journey is long. For in the darkest night, we must hope for joy, and we must find it.

When joy feels like a revolutionary act... when things are scary but our hearts hold up to the challenge.... when we are missing the ones we love and can delight in their memory.... when we are down and in need a hug and we find one... when we are relentlessly searching for a light in the darkness...

That’s renegade joy. That’s the Advent we are called to.

That’s where hope resides.

For in the darkest night, we must admit there will be music despite everything.

In the darkest night, for the sake of the house of the Lord our God, we must risk delight.

And so this advent, may you feel the hope that joy brings.

May you engage in renegade joy.

and may the delight of a toddler in red zooming boots be with you

now And always.

Amen.