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12/12/2021

### The Transformational Experience of Saying Yes to Joy

On August 28th 2000, Danny a 34 year old social worker in New York City, was on the way to meet his partner, Pete, a 32 year old graphic designer, for dinner. And, he was running late. As he exited the express train and began running through the New York Subway station, he noticed something strange out of the corner of his eye. A bundle, like a baby, on the ground. Thinking it odd for a little girl to leave behind her baby doll, he continued towards the stairs. As he began to make his way out of the station, he glanced back one more time. Only to notice that the doll's legs were now moving. Rushing down the stairs and over to the bundle Danny hurriedly unwrapped the swaddled black hoodie to discover a newborn baby, unclothed, still bearing a freshly cut umbilical cord. Unsuccessful in his efforts to try and alert passers by, Danny used a nearby payphone to call the police, and then rushed back to comfort and wait with the abandoned newborn. Eventually Pete, his dinner date, and the police, arriving to assist, met Danny in the subway station with the baby. The baby was taken to the hospital, thoroughly examined, and placed in the care of the state. And, while he was featured in headlines, news reports, and given a thorough investigation, three months went by, and no one came forward to claim the abandoned subway baby. Without a home, parents or relatives the infant's case went to family court, in order to terminate parental rights, and allow him the possibility of adoption. As the baby's court date arrived Danny, who had found him months ago in the subway station, was called to testify. After retelling his story to the judge and the court. And, as the hearing came to a conclusion, the judge called Danny to the stand. Informing him, "Mr. Stewart I just want to let you know, in situations where a baby has been abandoned we want to place that baby in pre-adoptive foster care as quickly as possible." Following up her statement with this question, "Would you be interested in adopting this baby?" Danny finding himself completely stunned, both by her question, and then by his answer replied, "Yes. But, I don't think it's that easy." To which the judge delightfully responded, "Well it can be. If you are interested."

Today, on our third Sunday in Advent, we come to find John the Baptist, still in the midst of the wilderness, crying out, pointing a finger, contempt in his voice and prophetic attitude in his swagger, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance... every tree... that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." And, we, being the ones who wandered out here into that same wilderness, eager to hear John's proclamation of (what we thought would be) good news, and prophecy of our salvation to come. Desperately searching for some form of solace, guidance, or at the very least a word of encouragement respond, "What then should we do"?

Leaving the courthouse that day, his head still spinning, Danny realized he needed to tell Pete. At home that evening as Danny retold the events of the baby's court case to his partner, Pete chided him "How could you say yes without consulting me." Without resources for an infant, living in a tiny apartment in the middle of New York City, holding the weight of accrued debt, and uninformed or prepared to bring a baby into their home much less their relationship Pete was hesitant, if not downright resistant. After a week passed, Danny came to Pete once more, this time having made the decision to go forward with the adoption. Telling his beloved partner "I would love nothing more than to do this with you, but I understand you may not be ready."

As John answers the crowd's pleading question "What then should we do" he does so in a way that reveals the truth of the good news we so desperately seek. Telling the crowds, share what you have with those who do not. Take only what you need, and no more, in his response to the tax collectors. Be honest, not deceitful, be fair, not coercive. And be grateful for what you have been given, in his answer to the soldiers. Don't allow yourselves to become puffed up or arrogant by your heritage or your religious affiliation, as he reminds the Pharisees and sadducees. Because when we are able to let go of all the

striving, desires, and distractions (even if for a moment) then we will be able to open our eyes and see what has always been right in front of us. All of the gifts we possess that are ripe for the plucking. When we share what we have, give what we can, and take only what we need, there is not only more than enough, but plenty more to go around. If we have anything then we have gifts to give. And it is this giving that can become the gift and joy of life.

Feeling hurt and as though Danny had chosen a random baby over their relationship, Pete blurted out in haste, well “good luck being a single parent in New York City.” And, walked out. When he returned an hour later, Pete found Danny still sitting in the same spot he left him, waiting to pick up the conversation where they left off. And, inviting Pete to join him on their first visit to see the baby. Apprehensively Pete agreed. And, as the day arrived for the visit, and Danny held the infant for the first time since the subway incident, Pete was overcome by the incredible beauty of Danny and the baby’s connection. Of this seemingly impossible thing becoming a real life possibility. As Danny placed the infant in Pete’s arms, blurring out “ok your turn”, Pete knew... they had just become parents. Giving himself over to the love and pure joy that is a newborn’s tiny fist gripping your ginormous finger.

That holiday season, Pete and Danny, brought home their new son, whom they named Kevin, for their first Christmas as a family of three. Their friends and family transformed their apartment into a home fit for a newborn baby overnight. And, Pete (who originally wasn’t even sure he wanted to welcome a baby into their home much less his life) soon became a stay at home dad. A dedicated and adoring one at that. In fact you can find the children’s book Pete wrote for his son Kevin, on Amazon, entitled *Our Subway Baby*.

If our Advent Season calls us to the practice of patience that reveals to us the beauty of hope, and the possibility of peace, then it is here too that we are invited into the transformational experience of joy. This is Advent. This is why John challenges us, and Jesus comes to redeem us, because we are ripe with possibility! If we are willing to claim it. As we sit at the cusp of joy. All we have to do is say yes. Yes to giving what we can, yes to sharing what we have, yes to bearing the fruit that lies at the heart of who we are. It can be hard work, I am sure Danny and Pete would attest to that. With the late night feedings, the terrible twos, the daunting homework assignments, the angst of teenage years, and the joyful pain of saying goodbye as your baby becomes an adult and leaves the safety of home for the independence and possibilities of their own future (As Kevin is now in the midst of earning his college degree). But, it’s worth it, because to ignore the bundle on the subway station floor, the need we know is right in front of us, the hope we can see in a new endeavor, the peace of knowing we gave it our all, is to deny the joy that God so desires for our lives. The Joy that John is preparing us for as he calls for our repentance, and the Joy that Jesus came to bring as he offers us, and the world the healing power of salvation. Of course we won’t all find a baby in the subway, nor is everyone equipped to take that baby into their home. Still, there are other joys glimmering forth out of the corner of our eye, beckoning us to pay attention, to stop, to see, and to say yes. So, what can we do to claim the joy that John prepares the way for and Jesus came to share? We can take the time to notice all the ways we are being called to share what we have, give what we can, be open to the possibilities of new endeavors, and be present to the need and the love around us. We can take hold of the joy that has been present from the beginning, always with us, and waiting to be claimed.