



joy to the world

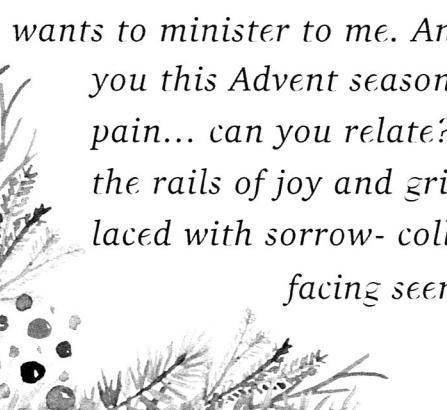
McClure

2022-12

Dear faithful ministry partner,

Merry Christmas to you and your family! On behalf of our family, we pray this season would be full of rich worship and fellowship around the birth of our humble Savior King. The season of Advent invites us to wait with eager expectation for God to accomplish His purposes in our lives and in this world. **We remember that He came, that He still comes as His Spirit transforms us, and that He will come again in glory to reign for all of time.** As we reflect on this year, with all its ups and downs, in the ways it felt just like the one before and in the ways it was different, our God asks us afresh to wait in trust that He is with us.

A verse from Ezra chapter 3 has found its place in my heart for the past few months as I have sensed God inviting me to return to it in prayer. The context is important: God's people have gathered together to celebrate the rebuilding of the temple- the very place God dwelt with His people- after the first temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. Some in the crowd would have seen and remembered the astonishing beauty and the glory of Solomon's temple. The moment was packed full of anticipation and emotion. As the foundation was being laid, we read that the Israelites were both weeping in sorrow and shouting in joy. Lamenting and praising at the same time. Then the line I can't seem to shake: **"No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of the weeping."** These two dramatically different emotional expressions were, in this moment, blended together into one loud, indistinguishable noise.



I suspect the reason God keeps returning my heart to this passage is because He wants to minister to me. And I wonder if what He is stirring in me might be a blessing to you this Advent season. The older I get, the more I move closer to places of sorrow and pain... can you relate? I once heard wise person say that all of life is lived in between the rails of joy and grief. The work Tiffany and I do brings us in proximity to things laced with sorrow- college students exploring their broken family backgrounds, couples facing seemingly hopeless marital conflict, friends unexpectedly losing someone close to them, and people we have invested in walking away from the faith, to name a few. Still, we also have the

privilege of seeing all sorts of joyful things. New life in Jesus, freedom from patterns of sin, young people serving for the good of others, leaders being developed and growing in their influence, college students leading their friends to Jesus, and so much more.

The Israelites in that crowd wept over their own sin that led- at least in part- to the destruction of the temple. They wept because they remembered what had been lost. Yet at the same time, they rejoiced at all God had done to free them from captivity and position them to rebuild God's dwelling place. They lived, you might say, in close proximity to both sorrow and joy. **And I sense Advent invites us to do the same.**

We remember in this season not just the fact of sin and evil that required the coming of Jesus, but also the brokenness both within and around us right now. All the places where the effects of sin have touched our lives. We are invited to give expression to it- to lament and cry and grieve, together with our God who meets us there. We also remember the staggering joy that God came to rescue us and to redeem all of creation. We are invited to worship the King who came humble and lowly to vanquish every power set against God's mission to bring us new life and ultimately a new creation. Both sorrow and delight. Not one to the exclusion of the other. May we worship in our grief and in our joy this season!

Tiffany and I count it a privilege to do this work and to invest in the staff and leaders who touch the lives of so many young people. We are so thankful for the sacrifices you make to support us! Unfortunately, this past year we saw a significant loss of monthly support and we now face our largest support deficit in almost 20 years of ministry. We would be so grateful if you considered us in decisions you make about your year-end giving or your budget for the coming year.

The best way you can help is by increasing your monthly commitment. Our goal is to raise \$2,000 in ongoing giving for 2023. Another great way to help is via a year-end gift, as we are hoping to raise \$10,000 in special gifts.

You can give an extra gift or increase your giving at www.reliant.org/matthew.mcclure. Or you can complete the enclosed form and return it to us. No matter your ability to help in this way, we are so very thankful for you! We truly see you as a partner with us in this work. Thank you so much! We are eager to see how God moves at BGSU in the coming year!

Together in the gospel,

Matthew, Tiffany, Mason, Phoebe, Naomi & Norah

