

As a man,
I have been predisposed and conditioned to like manly things:
some of these things are sports,
cigars,
shooting guns at a range,
hunting,
hard liquor,
John Wayne,
fire,
being able to pile up stuff on top of a pickup truck,
and car chases.

Around this time last year I saw my first Steve McQueen movie;
another thing all men are supposed to like.

The movie was Bullit.

We watched the movie for the specific reason that it was supposed to have an amazing car chase scene.

I was definitely not disappointed because the car chase scene was in fact one of the best I had ever seen.

And this past week I stumbled upon an article that discussed the top movie car chase scenes of all time.

Sure enough,
Bullit was on it.

As was,
The original Gone in 60 Seconds,
Ronin,
and The French Connection,
among others.

I started to think about what it is that makes a car chase scene good,
as opposed to just ordinary.

I think what type of cars involved matter;
its not a good car chase if one of the vehicles is a 1978 Gremlin,
or 1986 Chevy Chevette.

No,
the car needs to be cool,
lots of muscles ya know,
like a mustang or a corvette.
There also needs to be a lot hills,
obstacles,
and windy roads.

Finally,
the chase has to be pulse pounding.
The viewer needs to be unsure of if,
and when,

one of the cars will crash.

The overall combination of these things make the pursuit exhilarating.
Even though the viewer is not actually in the chase,
they feel like they are!

Yes,

the pursuit and the action of the car chase is what it is all about!

Car chases are not a passive action in a film,
or something that,
just happens.

No,

there is one character in pursuit of another,

and they use thousands of pounds of steel and engine to do it.

With this in mind,

let us turn our attention to the theme of the third week in Advent,

Joy.

For the longest time I thought of Joy simply as feeling good or happy.

I was convinced that Joy was something given to me,

or brought to me from the other room like a cup of coffee!

But as I was studying for my sermon,

I realized that joy is in fact just the opposite.

The biblical idea of joy is like those great car chases,

in that it is something we must pursue,

to chase and go after!

According to the bible,

Joy is the fruit of a right relation with God.

It is not something people can create by their own efforts.

A person cannot go into a wood shop and create joy;

joy is not a commodity that can be bought or traded.

We also must not confuse joy with pleasure.

The Bible distinguishes joy from pleasure.

In fact the Greek word for pleasure is the word from which we get our word hedonism,

which is the philosophy of self-centered pleasure-seeking.

Paul referred to false teachers as “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God”

The best example of God's joy is found in the parables of the lost coin and the prodigal son.

The Pharisees and scribes had criticized Jesus for receiving sinners and eating with them.

So Jesus told them these parables,

to illustrate what true joy is.

Both parables show how God reacts when someone repents,

and turns to God,

In the case of the lost gold coin,

the woman searched high and low to find her lost coin,

because if she hadn't found it,

her husband could legally divorce her.
In the parable of the prodigal son,
the son's willingness to admit his wrongdoing,
and His fathers grace,
allowed for him to be forgiven and restored fully to the family.
This is the joy God longs for us to experience.
The joy that one receives in knowing that their heavenly creator,
loves them so much,
that He forgives them whenever they repent of their sins.
But we must be willing to take action,
and pursue the love of God.
But wait a minute Karl,
you have been telling us that the season of Advent is about waiting,
and contemplation.
It's true,
but isn't it fair to say that sometimes it is a lot of work to be still?
In the craziness of our everyday lives it is challenging to rest and take it easy.
So in the pursuit of joy,
it takes work.
In our epistle reading today,
St. Paul tells to "rejoice always!"
Doing "anything" for an infinite amount of time,
is hard work isn't it?
As Ol' Bill Shakespeare said,
"Things won are done; joy's soul lies in the doing."
Attaining Joy is a lifelong pursuit,
just like peace,
and hope.
But we are also able to experience joy in the here and now.
But how?
We can have joy and rejoice always,
when we respond actively to the love of God.
We respond to God's love when we pray regularly,
study holy scriptures,
and receive our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.
When we help our neighbors,
and love the hurting,
we attain joy.
The greatest joy you and I can ever have is through intimate relationship with Jesus Christ,
who,

as our collect of the day for Fridays says,
Almighty God whose most dear Son went not up to joy but
first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he
was crucified”

Jesus Christ,
the Only Son of the Father,
and one-third of Holy Undivided Trinity,
went through challenges and difficulties in pursuit of Joy.

We too,
with our lives that are challenging sometimes,
and with the struggles we have,
can take courage in knowing that our Lord and Savior endured the same feelings,
in his pursuit of Joy.

Joy does not always equal happiness.
Joy is a state of contentment,
a way of being,
and a way of finding fulfillment,
that can only be found in God’s acceptance of us.

But we must chase after it!

The late Anglican theologian John Stott put it this way,

“Those who pursue happiness never find it.

Joy and peace are extremely elusive blessings.

Happiness is a will-o-the-wisp,
phantom.

Even as we reach out a hand to grasp it,
it vanishes into thin air.”

Even though joy can seem elusive,

if we draw nearer to God,

and chase after Him,

we will find hope, peace AND JOY!

As we draw closer to the Nativity of our Lord,

let us hop in our cars and buckle up,

because we are chasing the best driver ever!

Amen.