

Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

“Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us.”

The cream flowed to the bottom of the mug of coffee, then billowed up in liquid clouds, slowly dispersing and merging into the perfect coffee colour.

Butter, sugar, flour, and eggs came together in the bowl under the speed of the mixer, going from separate ingredients to forming a smooth, silky cake batter ready for baking.

During some heart-searching and prayer, a renewed sense of reliance on God brought a sense of relief from anxiety, making way for joy and thankfulness to permeate the soul.

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What should we do? Asked those with plenty. Share with those in need, John said.

What should we do? Asked the ones with power. Do not use or manipulate others, John said.

What should we do? Asked those who were dissatisfied. Learn to be content, John said.

What should we do? Asked those who were looking for the answer. Watch and wait just a little longer, John said. He is coming, and He is full of glory.

John is a pot-stirrer extraordinaire. He tells everyone to change because a new thing is on the horizon. So what does stirring achieve? Stirring combines multiple things into one thing. Stirring creates something new.

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That’s quite the thing to ask for. It is a request to be disturbed from complacency. It’s asking God to change things, and not many of us really like a lot of change. It’s saying that we want God to do awesome things with us and around us.

Now I don’t know about you, but I’ve been surprised by God a few times in my life. If you’d told twenty-year-old me, for example, that a decade later I’d be a priest, you would have blown my mind. God has this funny way of doing things that we don’t plan or expect, and the things we do plan or expect often don’t work out how we thought. Because the thing with stirring is that it’s an ongoing action, with space for mystery and unknowing.

So do you really want to be stirred? Do we really want the Lord’s power to come among us?

Here’s a question for you. Raise your hand if you’re a fan of Christmas songs on the radio. Some of them are terribly cheesy, but I enjoy a jingle of bells and some commercialised festive cheer when I’m driving! But, do you know what’s slightly ominous? That song ‘you’d better watch out,’ about Santa. It’s all about how you’d better not be anything other than happy and perfect, or Santa will come and get you! Well, not quite, but it is about how he is always watching and judging. Santa’s hand is always hovering with the black marker ready to demote you to the naughty list, and he sees EVERYTHING. So, be good for goodness’ sake! But then there’s Jesus. And here’s the good news: Jesus is watching too, but not to catch us out.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians is my favourite book of the Bible because it’s so joyful and uplifting, and in today’s reading, we hear the resounding refrain: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” Rejoice. Rejoice because of one profound truth: The Lord is near.

This is the heart of John’s message as well. And while “you’d better watch out” is a pretty fair modernisation of John’s fiery preaching, Jesus—the Lord who is near—isn’t just

waiting to put us on the naughty list. Unlike Santa, who, let's be honest, seems a bit judgmental, Jesus draws near to us with love and mercy, longing to guide us toward fullness of life.

John's stirring work—calling us to repentance—lays the groundwork for Paul's invitation to rejoice. One leads to the other: when we turn from what holds us back, we make room for the joy of God's presence. Repentance isn't just about what we're turning away from; it's about what we're turning toward: a deeper life with God, filled with joy and peace.

So what does it mean for the Lord to be near? Imagine Jesus standing behind you, watching over your shoulder as you went through an ordinary day. Does that sound brilliant, or would you rather not?! Would it change how you acted or spoke? The thought might feel unsettling at first, but Paul invites us to see God's nearness as a reason for rejoicing. God's presence isn't about catching us in our faults; it's about being close enough to guide, comfort, and transform us. The Lord who is near is the one who loves us, created us, marvels in us, and breathes the spark of life into our souls. Even more, Jesus' constant presence is a source of comfort, joy, and transformation, because this nearness doesn't just *call* us to be better people; it *enables* us to be better. And that's the difference between Santa's naughty list and Jesus' watchful love: Santa demands perfection; Jesus offers grace.

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Just as stirring the cream into the coffee creates a new, delicious blend, God's stirring in our lives combines grace, love, and purpose to produce joy that can even transcend whatever circumstances we find ourselves in. For Paul and the Philippians, this joy wasn't fleeting or shallow; it was deeply rooted in the presence of the Lord. Joy doesn't ignore the hard realities of life. It acknowledges them but chooses to anchor itself in God's unchanging love. And this joy, once stirred into our hearts, overflows into action. It leads us to live lives of gratitude, generosity, and grace.

So do you want to be stirred?

May this be our prayer as we approach the final week of Advent, that God will stir up joy in our hearts, so we can rejoice in his nearness and share that joy with others. John reminds us that the Lord is near, and it is true. So we anticipate the joy of Christ's coming, and we respond to his presence with gratitude, action, and joy. "The Lord is near." Let this truth shape how we live, how we love, and how we prepare for the coming of Christ.

Stir up your power, O Lord, stir up your joy in us, and with great power come among us. Amen.