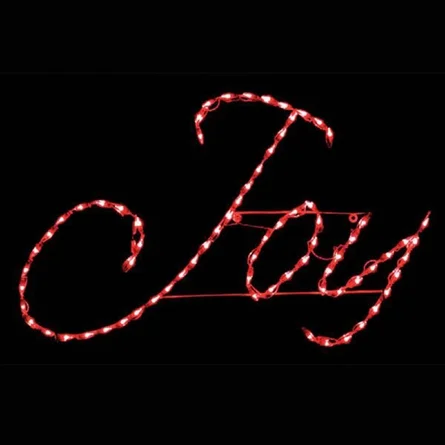
**Reflection for Monday,**

**December 11, 2023**



December can take a lot of emotional energy. So how do we respond when we enter the third week of Advent and we consider its meaning in *joy*?

There are challenges to joy in the world right now, and I know that some people find the holiday season difficult most every year. So this question of joy has me taking a quiet and personal inventory of what, exactly, gives me joy these days.

On Saturday, joy was a trip with Randy to the U.C. Berkeley Botanical Garden. We agreed that each time we go there, we discover some new and wondrous plants. Black tree fern, anybody? It was strange and beautiful.

Wednesday evening, sitting in the sanctuary and letting the Taize music sweep over me was a quiet and genuine joy. (I look forward to a slightly more playful joy with our annual reading of *The Velveteen Rabbit* this coming Wednesday.)

But my special pleasure over the past two weeks has been taking our feisty, anxious dog out for nighttime walks. (It’s not a good idea to take her out in public when we are likely to meet other humans or dogs.) We stroll in the brisk air and she can sniff at will while I take in the holiday decorations in my neighborhood. Some people have curtains open to reveal glistening Christmas trees. Others have overflowing yards of tin solders, blow-up grinches, and teddy bears revolving on a ferris wheel.

I can’t decide if I like the tasteful lights or the garish displays better. I do know that these nocturnal walks give me joy. So I’m claiming this little thing, this nightly stroll, as my light that shines in the darkness (both literally and spiritually). I hope that many forms of light are glowing as sustenance and joy in your lives too.

In faith,

Elizabeth