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“Don’t be afraid!” [the angel] said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ~ *Luke 2:10, NLT*”

Imagine being a relatively poor, unsuspecting sheep farmer on a hill at night. Suddenly, there is a bright light as though floodlights were turned on and a mysterious figure starts talking with you. In the Christmas story, it is no wonder that the angel who appeared to the shepherds begins with “Don’t be afraid.” From there, though, things just get weirder. The angel proclaims *good news* that will bring *great joy* to *everybody*. A baby has been born, nearby in a ramshackle shelter, who will rescue others and save them from captivity and oppression.

The shepherds were filled with wonder when everything came true as the mysterious messenger had said. The stories that follow are filled with examples of good news: People being healed, encouraged, and freed from difficult and destructive lives and situations.

Tragically, Christianity has not always brought with it such good news. I’m sure we can all think of times when, combined with power and money, people and organizations have caused harm in the name of their religious beliefs – Christians included.

Whatever your background or belief, we hope that people who hear the name “Christian Horizons” will associate it with “good news.” Even better, good news of *great joy*.

I used to support a man who I’ll refer to as Saint Nicholas. It’s a fitting name for many reasons. St. Nick didn’t live an easy life. He faced health challenges along with his intellectual disability and our difficulty understanding him would lead to agitation. Yet, when St. Nick was happy everyone in the house knew it. He would almost hop around the house, swinging his arms and vocalizing to himself in a sing-song way. No matter what mood I was in coming into the house, if St. Nick was in a good mood, it brought *great joy* to everyone around him. It was impossible to be frustrated or upset if he was happy.

Which leads to my final point. This *good news* of *great joy* is for *everybody*. Our commitment to valuing people and respecting their gifts and contribution doesn’t just apply to government officials, religious leaders, or talented superstars. I’m sure each of us can think of times when we experienced great joy simply being in the presence of someone who had discovered this joy and was willing to share it with others. Sometimes, deep joy is experienced even in the midst of otherwise difficult circumstances.

Wherever you're at today, I pray that you experience this great joy and share it with others. I truly believe that we can find it if we look hard enough – sometimes in the most unexpected places. I know in my work at Christian Horizons, it has often been the people who use our services who bring this message of *good news* of *great joy for all people*. I hope and pray that I then carry this message to those around me.

Making the Connection

- Realizing that the holidays can be difficult times for many of us, where is one place you are finding joy these days?
- December 3rd is the *International Day of Persons with Disabilities*. What are a couple of ways we can work for a more equitable society – one where *everybody* has access to jobs, housing, education, faith communities and public spaces?