Today's Advent Devotional is offered by Knut Panknin

Making Room for Joy

As I was pondering about my Advent reflection and what joy means to me, two statistics caught my eye: A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that life expectancy in the US for people age 25 to 64 has fallen between 2010 and 2017, with the highest relative jump in death rates for people age 25 to 34.

Those are people who were just starting their prime years and who should have had a bright future ahead of them. One researcher said about the numbers: "People are feeling worse about themselves and their futures, and that's leading them to do things that are self-destructive and not promoting health."

The second statistic was on consumerism. Americans are expected to spend more than $9 billion on "Cyber Monday" alone, making it the biggest shopping day this year.

There is no obvious connection between those two figures, but I still wondered: Are we feeling worse and trying to compensate for our negative emotions through the "sugar high" of buying stuff? What would joy that is life-giving and affirming in the deepest sense look like?
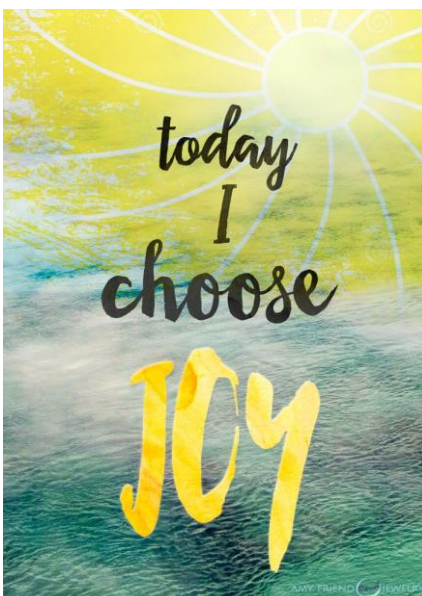
The answer to that question for me is my faith in the living God. One line in the song "Joy to the World" says: "Let every heart prepare Christ room." It sounds so simple and yet, it is the essence for experiencing true joy. When I make room for God, I make room for life. I make room for love. I make room for relationship. I make room for forgiveness – forgiving myself and others.

In making room for Him, my focus shifts. It shifts from blaming myself for mistakes. It shifts from the baggage of past disappointments. It

shifts from not living up to my expectations and those of other people. It shifts from feeling empty and filling that empty spot with buying "stuff".

Joy to the world starts with room for joy within. As the Advent season begins, I am committed to shifting my focus and to making room. Will you join me?