



Are You the One Who Is to Come?

Third Sunday of Advent (Peace)

Matthew 11:2-11

When John the Baptist, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor."

December 11, 2016

Thoughts for the Week

Scriptures: Isaiah 35: 1-6, 10 • James 5: 7-10 • Matthew 11: 2-11

I imagine most Christians, at least those who follow the liturgical year with some attention, will list the following times as their favorites: Christmas, of course, for obvious reasons; Easter because spring invites new life, spiritually and seasonally. But few will place Lent in first place, again for obvious reasons.

To my mind, however, there is one season that gets squeezed out every year and that is Advent. The reason, I think this is so, is because it is only four weeks in length and it is overshadowed by Christmas and all the activities that occur during Advent. Moreover, it is often described simply as a time of preparation or even a time of waiting...waiting for Christmas, obviously. Let me suggest though that this attitude is short sighted and misses some of the most beautiful scriptures, poetry and music of the entire liturgical year. Advent has its own meaning and importance and it has little to do with Christmas. Rather, it is a unique time for us to reflect on time or more specifically on "end-time" on the mystery of time that is still left for us to think about; the advent of Christ's coming, not only in time and in history but in eternity. Obviously, that is a rather difficult concept to wrap our minds around. We don't like to think very much about the end of anything, especially the end of everything that we have become so used to in life.

Let's turn then to each of the three Advent Scriptures for this Third Sunday of the season and see what hopeful truths they offer.

The first selection comes from the Eighth Century B.C. poet, Isaiah. He is writing for his own people who are in desert exile. He assures them that some day their exile, like the sand of the desert itself will turn to spring. It will bloom with abundant flowers. Joyful song will be heard ringing across the dunes. Some day they will see the glory and splendor of their God. When that time appears all life will be renewed like spring: "The eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf will be cleared, the tongue of the dumb will sing...sorrow and mourning will flee."

This is what life in the world will look like when the Christ of the ages will finally appear. Obviously Isaiah is speaking here in poetic terms, in metaphor of a period of time without end much to be hoped for. It is the way in which God imagines a world that could be and ought to be but is not yet, not a dry desert without hope but a time where we can imagine life itself as spring, water flowing abundantly in the draws, flowers springing from the earth.

This then is the first Advent lesson: As we await the coming of the Lord of eternity let's make life on this earth resemble an eternal spring.

James, brother of the Lord, follows up on Isaiah's nature metaphor. "As you await the coming of the Lord amidst the sufferings of this present age, do not grumble against one another; be patient, my brothers patient like the farmer who awaits the precious yield of the soil."

This is the second Advent lesson: the coming of the Lord of eternity takes time. In the meantime, be patient and make the Lord's presence happen now by your good works.

Finally, in the gospel of Matthew we notice that John the Baptist in prison is also struggling with the question of time and the Messiah's coming. He instructs his disciples to go and ask Jesus if he is indeed the Messiah or whether they should look for someone else. When asked, Jesus dodges the question by simply telling them to look around: "the blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are being raised to life and the poor have the good news preached to them. In short, Jesus answer is that the end times have already arrived. When you see these things happening in the world you will not need to look for someone else.

So, that is the third Advent lesson: as we wait we discover that end times have arrived. Christ invites all of us to bring Christ's coming about each day by performing the acts that he did but in our own personal human ways. If we are determined to do all this there will be no need to ask any more questions about the Lord's coming. The Lord of history and eternity has arrived. By the way, all that is why I appreciate Advent so much when it rolls around each year!

Third Sunday of Advent-Peace

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11

*Christian stewards rejoice in God's gifts to us,
likened to beautiful jewels or gardens,
and understand we must follow the Lord's example
by sharing them with others in love and justice.*

Luke 1:46-50, 53-54

*Mary responds to Elizabeth with joy that she accepts her call to be the Mother of God.
Do we, as Christian stewards, also respond joyfully to God's call?*

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

*The Christian steward seeks to develop a deeper prayer life to draw closer to the Lord
by giving Him constant thanks and becoming holy.*

John 1:6-8, 19-28

*John the Baptist came to testify to the light, who is Jesus.
Does our life reflect that we believe Jesus is our light and salvation?*

Stewardship Thought

*All of the people in today's readings
the prophet Isaiah, the Virgin Mary, Paul & John the Baptist,
seemed to understand clearly and rejoice in what God was calling them to be and to do.*

Do I? Do You?

Amen