

Sermons at Christ Church

Be A Joyful Gift To Others.

Advent II

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And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

John begins the good news of Jesus Christ by preparing the way for the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. According to Mark, all who heard John preach, went to him to confess their sins and be baptized. The good news of Jesus Christ which begins with baptism at the river Jordan is an amazing story that lifts people up from the abyss of hopelessness and transforms them into agents of human transformation.

The good news is the food that nourishes the famished and thirsty soul. I love the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it does not only open my eyes to who I am but who I can be. Hearing the good news creates in me the awareness of my own limitations, my faults-which are many, and my sins-which are many too.

The good news will not be good news if it is about me or you or how awful a person I am or you are. The good news of Jesus Christ is what it is because it encourages and motivates us to dwell on the marvelously incredible fact of who we are- as God's children.

The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ assures us that our very existence is a cause for wonder. And in as much as this awareness evokes a deep sense of joy within me, it also brings tears to my eyes because of the ways in which we squander the gift of being human. But there is this deep consolation that I find in the good news, that in spite of all else, we are loved and that our perceived unworthiness, self-rejection and sense of defilement is burned away by the love of God which finds its fulfillment in the Jesus of Nazareth. The man who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and transforms our lives-just so we may know and embrace why we were born.

Mark Twain once said that the *“Two greatest days of your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.”* John the Baptizer understood why he was born, as one who was to proclaim the good news of repentance and baptize those who sought a new beginning with God. The sacred question is, do we know why we were born?

John’s sense of self-importance, if he had any, was not enough for him to cast himself as the expected Messiah. He was deeply in sync with who he was. He knew why he was born and he knew that having more to live with is no substitute for having more to live for. He had something to live for, and was quick to define himself as not the expected one, but as one whose life’s purpose was to prepare the way for the one who with the good news transforms life and provides us with the reason why we were born. Why were you born? Do you know why you were born?

There’s a story of a Baptist who lived in an Irish dominated Roman Catholic neighborhood. And as many of you know, Roman Catholics do not eat red meat during Lent. But it just so happened that their Baptist neighbor grilled almost every day during Lent. And as you can tell with grilling, the smoke filled the neighborhood creating a lot of discomfort for these poor Roman Catholic neighbors. To deal with this Baptist neighbor, they all agreed to convert him. And so they worked on him, year after year until he eventually converted. They then had him Baptized, and during his Baptism, the priest sprinkled water on him and said to him, you were born a Baptist, raised a Baptist but with the gift of this water, you are now a Roman Catholic. The following Lent, the Roman Catholics were beside themselves with rage because their newly converted Roman Catholic was grilling. They approached him and reminded him that he is now a Roman Catholic and cannot eat meat during Lent. The man took water, sprinkled it on the meat and said, you were born a cow, you were raised a cow but by the gift of this water, you are now a fish. The transformation that comes with baptism didn’t permeate deep into this man. The reason why he became a Catholic was lost on him. But the reason why we experience the transformation that comes with our baptism shouldn’t be lost on us.

The gift of Advent is that it presents us with an opportunity for a new vision of ourselves and the world around us. You may call it a holy discontent-a deep dissatisfaction with what is on the one hand and a clear grasp of what can be on the other.

What is, is the hopeless reality the prophet Isaiah speaks about, “All people are grass, their constancy is like the flowers of the field.” The prophet’s oracle affirms what we all know about the fleeting nature of our lives. Like flowers of the field, human life withers away. But if withering away like grass is all there is to the human story, then where is human hope? Why were we born?

In Advent, we are assured of the coming of the God of human hope, the God in whom human restlessness abides. The God who is not only the ultimate meaning and purpose of human life but the God in whom we find human fulfillment.

A.W. Tozer wrote this “God is love and God is sovereign. His love disposes Him to desire our everlasting welfare, and his sovereignty enables him to secure it.” I agree, because, Advent is about human hope in a sovereign God who rules beyond space and time, is not bound by space and time and in His own time establishes that which He purposes to happen.

Advent is about God’s time. Sometimes we wonder why God delays. Why has the Lord not returned? Peter’s audience inquire. But Peter assures his anxious readers that although there’s been a delay in the coming of the Lord, the Lord has not delayed because God is not in a hurry, nor is He being slow in keeping His promise. We are impatient because of all the wars, violence, horrific crimes, suffering and dehumanization that we and others have to go through. All these creates the longing for the coming of God’s kingdom. To the contrary, God is patient, and through His patience, He offers you and I the space to repent, to make 180 degree turn, just so we may realize within our own lives the kingdom that has been promised, just so through the process of waiting we can rediscover the reason we were born.

For how can we desire the coming of the Lord when we ourselves are not ready and willing to walk down the narrow rugged path to the banks of the River Jordan where John the Baptizer is calling each of us to repentance, to a change in the direction of our lives, to a new vision of what can be?

The hope of Advent is captured in the thoughts of the psalmist who assures us that “The Lord will indeed grant prosperity, and our land will yield its increase.”

But I am not looking at a piece of land producing wheat, barley, corn, rice or any other crop in abundance, I am looking at me, I am looking at you, I am looking at all of us as pieces of land which is supposed to yield fruits of holy life, fruits of a life lived in purity and peace, fruits of a life lived in gratitude and righteousness, fruits of a life lived in humility and faithfulness. Fruits of a life turned around from its detour to one that is lived in full honor and glory of God-because we know why we were born.

The profound thing about John was that he didn't seek to draw attention to himself, but to Jesus, the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit-that one gift which we need for a transformed life, that one gift which we need for a meaningful life, that one gift which we need for a fulfilled life.

The reality is that we are not what we are because to be a human being is a movement, a becoming, a process and a journey from what we are to what we are not but what we can become because of a transformed life in our Savior Jesus Christ. It is a never-ending process of learning, unlearning and relearning. It involves being pregnant with hope and possibility, and suffering the ups and downs of the human adventure-but we never give up. .

Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist once wrote that "I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become." What do you choose to become? One who was born a cow, raised as a cow and by the gift of water and the spirit is now a fish or one who simply wants to remain a cow in spite of the water and the spirit?

Unlike John, you and I may not know why we were born but our belief in the good news of Jesus Christ should drive us in living life to God's glory. I love the good news of Jesus Christ I love the good news of Jesus Christ and the hope it restores in the human story. I love the good news and the way it challenges me. And I'd rather believe in the good news of human salvation than believe in nothing. **Amen.**