

December 6, 2015 Second Sunday in Advent

Lighting the Wreath – The Randals Family

In the beginning was the Word—

spoken and breathed,

a promise made and kept.

Speak it loud and clear—

God’s promise is true!

The Word was in the beginning,

and through him all things come into being.

Eternal and near at hand,

Already and not-yet,

God’s promise is the foundation of all life.

Do not hold back!

Speak out, giving voice to God’s peace that passes all understanding.

~candle is lit~

Prayer of the Day

God of all Grace and Peace,

as we continue this advent journey,

we come to you in all honesty and courage

to lift up to you our songs and prayers,

so as we do we glorify you along with the saints of every time and place.

You are

Call to Confession

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But when we openly confess our sins before God and neighbor, God will help us to repent, transform.

Prayer of Confession (to the tune of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”)

Forgive us, Lord, for times when peace was lost,

And moments when we never thought to love,

For times when we oppress and offend,

And fight for things which kill us in the end.

Forgive, forgive, forgive us all our sins

And help us be in peace with all our kin.

Assurance of Pardon

God shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

The Lord is our righteousness!

Friends, I proclaim to you that our sins are forgiven! May the peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you. Alleluia!

Responsive Reading: LUKE 1:68-79 Canticle of Zechariah (please see bulletin)

Time out For Teaching: Surprise! Repent!

Another surprise of Advent is that it contains a call to repentance.

Repentance seems more like a Lenten activity, as we lead up to Easter and prepare ourselves, try to purify our hearts to receive the Resurrected Christ.

But it also is a call for us during this time as we lead up to the birth of Christ.

When we say repentance - what does that mean to you?

Repentance means to turn ourselves around. It is to not only confess our sins to God and before one another, but to also change our ways. Our ways of behaving, our ways of thinking. The Greek word is "metanoia" which means a change of the mind - noia or noos.

We probably don't take seriously enough the importance of repentance. In order for this world to be a better, transformed place, it has to begin with us. We have to change our ways most befitting of God's kingdom living. But in order for us to change, we have to first admit our own problems. Not just the random mistakes, but the things that we have built up around our hearts that give us permission to keep fooling ourselves into thinking

we are not broken. Our admission of brokenness opens doors to God's forgiveness. Our admission of guilt makes us more gracious to others. Ask God to help you change your mind, transform your life, not just so you're a better person, but because when you change, the world will also be better for it.

Prayer for Illumination

Reveal to us your word, O God,
and grant us peace within ourselves and with you,
that in our hearing and our living and our doing,
your word may become flesh with us,
in the name of your son Jesus our Lord,
ruler of the universe. Amen.

MALACHI 3:1-4

1See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight — indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. 2But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; 3he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. 4Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

LUKE 3:1-6

1In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight.

5Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Sermon: Inquire Within

One year I got a sweater for Christmas. It was knit from beautiful, soft-spun wool. It was probably quite expensive. It had sheep all over it, sheep about two inches long, with little black dots for eyes and a slight smile on their muzzles. All of the sheep were white, except for one, right in the middle of the sweater, which was a brownish-black. I politely (thought) said thank you. I wasn't sure what to say. It wasn't something I would ever wear. Did I mention that the center sheep also had a bow around his neck? But every time I looked at it in the closet, I just couldn't bring myself to put it on. Finally my mother confronted me: "Why don't you ever wear it? Don't you like it?"

I was filled with a deep regret when I was confronted. I was afraid to tell the truth about this sweater because I didn't want to hurt my parents' feelings. Finally I confessed. Then I was told, "If you had told the truth that you didn't like it, I could have returned it and gotten you something else." If only I had spoken the truth, we all would have been more at peace.

At Christmas time we get many opportunities to tell the truth, speak out. Be it time for you to come clean with a family member, be it something you need God's help to change in yourself. Sometimes the extra time we spend with family can force us to face a part of ourselves that we don't like very much, or remind us of something that we have always felt was wrong.

John the Baptist bursts into the gospel story, calling for change between us and our God. He calls for repentance, through speaking the truth. The truth was probably hard to come by in his time, as we are reminded of who was in charge at the time: "In the

fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene..." These men ruled the land, enforcing through Roman Imperial Rule, a kind of truth that kept Roman Peace. The Roman Peace was what was necessary to keep people from toppling the governors of the land. But true peace, the peace of God, was difficult to find, and certainly not the same as what the Romans enforced. There were often Jewish peasant uprisings against the Roman governors because of a corrupt tax system. And, there was a growing hostility between the Temple Authorities and the Roman military.

It was a world of unrest. John the Baptist, born into this world, but certainly not living as if he is of this world. Born to Jewish parents, but grew up into this eccentric, zealous man who understood his mission very well, a mission God has sent him to proclaim the coming Messiah. He calls for everyone to repent, and to prepare a way for all the world to receive the Messiah. He says to make the mountains flat, the deep valleys raised up, the roads straightened. In essence, make oneself ready to face God, honestly, repentant, and there shall be peace with him. Inquire within our faults and tell them to God.

Recently I was looking at a mail-order catalogue that prints slogans on T-shirts, coffee cups and bumper stickers. One of their T-shirts had a picture of the Buddha on the front of it and it said simply, "Inquire within."

While I'm not a Buddhist, I still think it's a very good piece of advice. For when we take time to "Inquire within" ourselves we start to be honest about who we are and who God wants us to be. We learn a lot from that. A life unexamined isn't worth living.

A heart stuck in sin is one that has not spent enough time examining itself. A sinful heart is one that has trouble being honest with itself. As it says in the New Testament, "If we say we are without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." A

sinful heart has a difficult time recognizing the Messiah when he's near.

Inquire within - with the same urgency that John the Baptist proclaimed it.

The time is NOW, he said. Make this Christmas more free of regret than ever before.

Consider Ebenezer Scrooge. A man who repented of his ways after he was shown - with the help of the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future - a life filled with anger and regretful things. This terrifying dream lead him to wake up Christmas Morning with a new life, repentant and joyful. He was transformed.

Inquire within yourselves. Right away. And when you see what needs to change, ask God to help. This is the way to peace with our Savior, the means to a life of freedom. Alleluia! Amen.

Service of Holy Communion

Invitation to the Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

God of our salvation,
we do not deserve your love and yet you lavish it upon us.
Not being content to be apart from us,
you came to us in human form,
donning flesh and becoming one of us.
You are not a God that is removed from our reality
but is intimately present in our lives and our struggles.
We lift up to you our thanks for your presence among us.
We give thanks for your son, Jesus Christ,
the very incarnation of your being on this earth.
With all of creation, with all peoples in every time and place
we join the ever lasting chorus:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna in the highest.

We remember how you called your servant Mary to bear your son,
how you called your servant Joseph to accompany her,
how you called the wise men to search and the shepherds to ponder,
how you called John to proclaim and Jesus to be baptized,
how you called Peter and the disciples to follow and serve.
With them, we gather on the night on which Jesus was betrayed,
when, after having dinner with his friends, he took the bread,

blessed it and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying,
take, eat, do this in remembrance of me.

Likewise, he took the cup and, pouring it, said,
this is cup of the salvation, shed in my blood, for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this in remembrance of me.

For as long as we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the resurrection of our living savior until he comes again.

As we wait, during this blessed rest known as the season of Advent,
we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen;

Christ will come again.

We give thanks for your gifts of grace,
and ask that your Holy Spirit would come to bless this sacrament,
that we might preside with you and you in us.

We also ask for your presence to rest upon all the people we have mentioned today who
are in need of hope and healing:

For the people of San Bernardino and people everywhere who live in a state of terror.

For this community as we repent of the past and seek ways to be a better city.

For your refugees who spent this season of joy in a foreign land.

For your believers who experience persecution abroad

Hear us as we pray the prayer you taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,

for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Prayer after Communion

Master of the Universe, who sent your Son to redeem the world and will send him again to be our judge: give us grace so to imitate him in the humility and purity of his first coming that, when he comes again, we may be ready to greet him with joyful love and firm faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.